BAD GIRLS!

FROM ZORRO TO
LADY RAWHIDE!
**DON
McGREGOR**

VAMPIRELLA
TO ELVIRA!
**RICHARD
HOWELL**

MORE!

#144

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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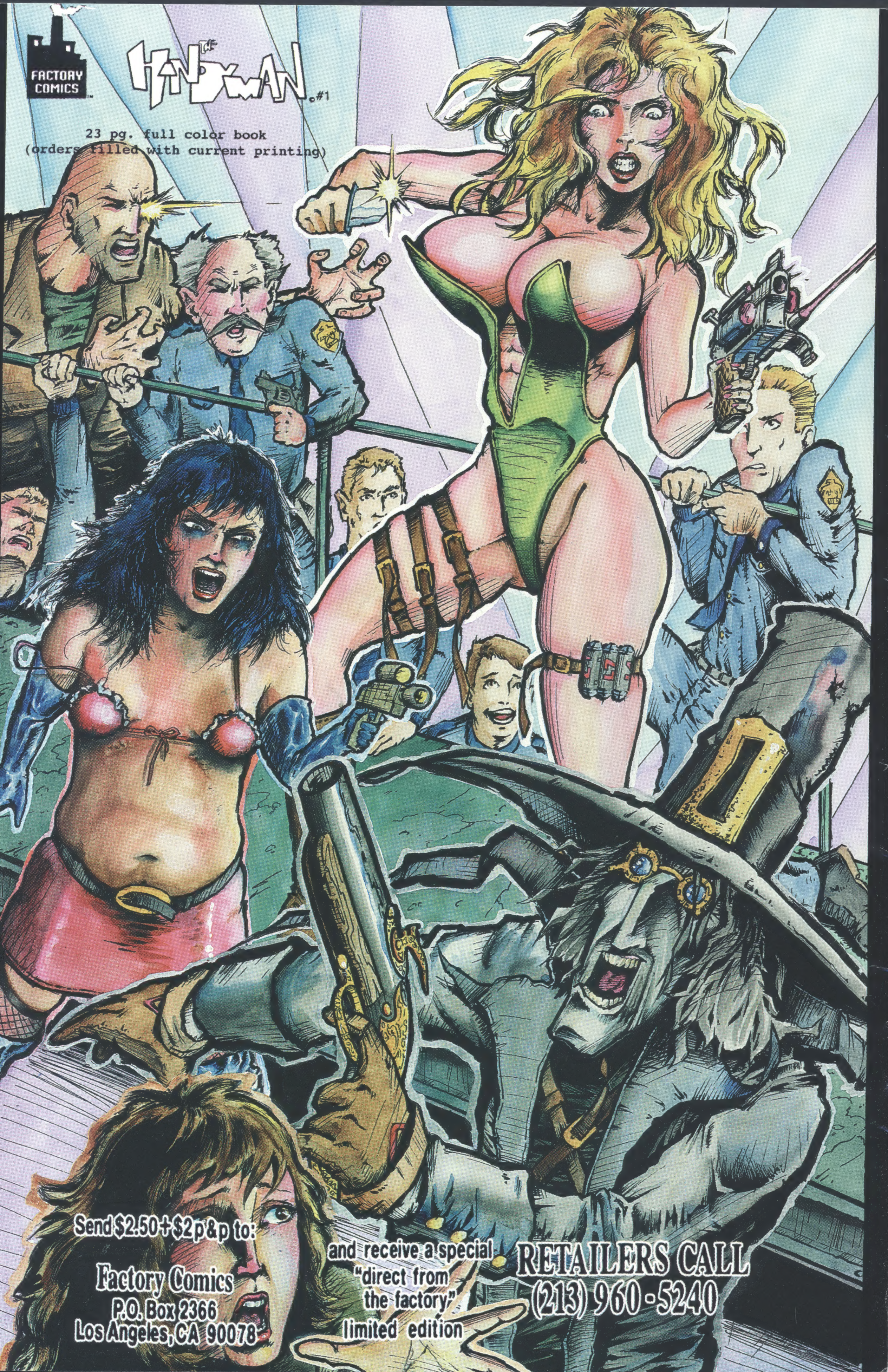

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what if — vampirella, lady rawhide & lady death

Art: BRIAN STELFREEZE

UP FRONT

Back in the early '80s, there was a sort-of bad girls trend — actually more of a "superhero women" type of thing, really (to use the unwieldy title of a **Stan Lee** super heroine comics anthology of the period published by Simon & Schuster).

"Bad girls" were a bit offbeat for mainstream comics back then (how times change) but, hey, I did my best to subvert the status quo. At a time when Marvel scripters were bemoaning such spin-offs as Spider-Woman, I went out of my way to seek assignment to what certainly seemed the most unlikely idea of them all — the She-Hulk.

Sure, today, after some fifteen years of building up on the foundations I soundly established from the start, the She-Hulk is an accepted, even a well-loved and familiar character.

But think back. The Hulk of that era was no intelligent, erudite behemoth; he was an almost inarticulate engine of destruction. What, then, could we expect of a She-Hulk but . . . more of the same. And, indeed, in Stan's first issue, that's exactly what we got.

Which is why I, alone, of all the Marvel Bullpen back then, actually wanted to write She-Hulk.

Under my influence, she became intelligent and amorous — and adventurous — with one "bookish" boyfriend for her lawyerly self, and a "toy boy" for her sensuous green self. She sipped cocktails and rode around in a pink Cadillac convertible. She had a lively libido and even spent a naughty night with The Thing (how that one slipped by the Comics Code I still don't know).

She-Hulk was Marvel's first real "bad girl."

—David

CONTENTS

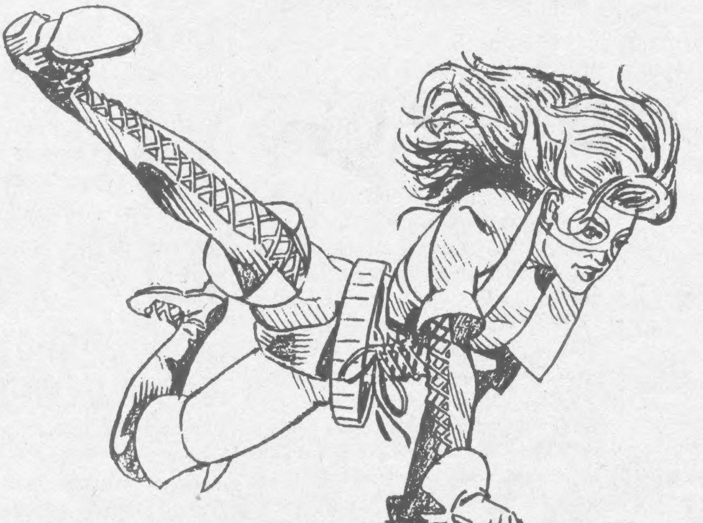
EDITORIAL:
UP FRONT
dak is no stranger to "bad girls"
3

WRITER:
DON McGREGOR
lady rawhide is hot as the crack of a whip searing flesh — and she's bursting out of . . . er . . . the pages of *zorro* into her own mini-series this summer, compliments of the "dauntless" one
4

WRITER/ARTIST:
RON FONTES
hot babes? cool cats? sex & violence? *captain fortune's* got 'em all — and more — in a new sci-fi "bad girls" series, from rip-off press, no less
29

WRITER/ARTIST/ EDITOR:
RICHARD HOWELL
from harvard to claypool comics, by way of marvel, dc, *creepy & eerie* — and, best of all, by way of bad girls *vampirella & elvira*
43

“I realized even though I’d watched all those ZORRO



DON McGREGOR

When I read a comic in 1975 after a five-year sabbatical, it was written by Don McGregor — AMAZING ADVENTURES #34 with Killraven. Craig Russell, of course, was the artist. I was surprised that the level of craftsmanship had advanced so much since I had stopped reading comics in late 1970. Some weeks later I read five years worth of AVENGERS, mostly by Steve Englehart, and was hooked again.

If I’d come in year or two later, after Don, Steve and some others had left Marvel, it might have been a different story.

Yet, Don McGregor had never been interviewed in COMICS INTERVIEW. This was unusual. David Anthony Kraft, CI’s head honcho, had served a stint as associate editor on staff at Marvel side-by-side with Don from early 1974-’75 and published two books by McGregor, DRAGONFLAME and THE VARIABLE SYNDROME. (Look in the ads, folks; DAK’s bound to advertise them.) DAK had also Don’s help dialoguing a few pages of DEFENDERS #48, and Don’s “The Trespasser” in EERIE #103-#105 was dedicated to DAK.

So why hadn’t Don been interviewed here in the pages of COMICS INTERVIEW during its more than 12 years of existence??

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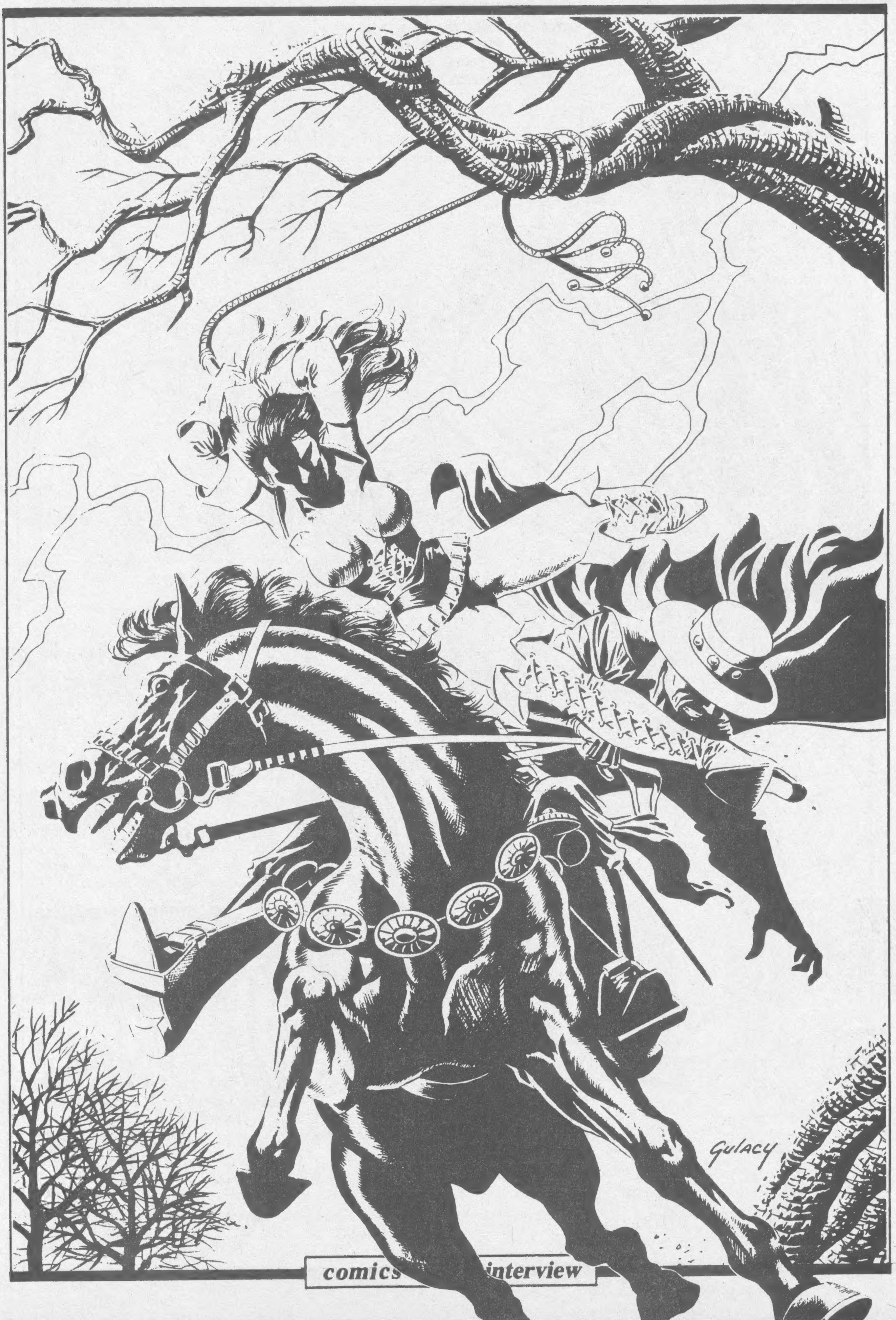
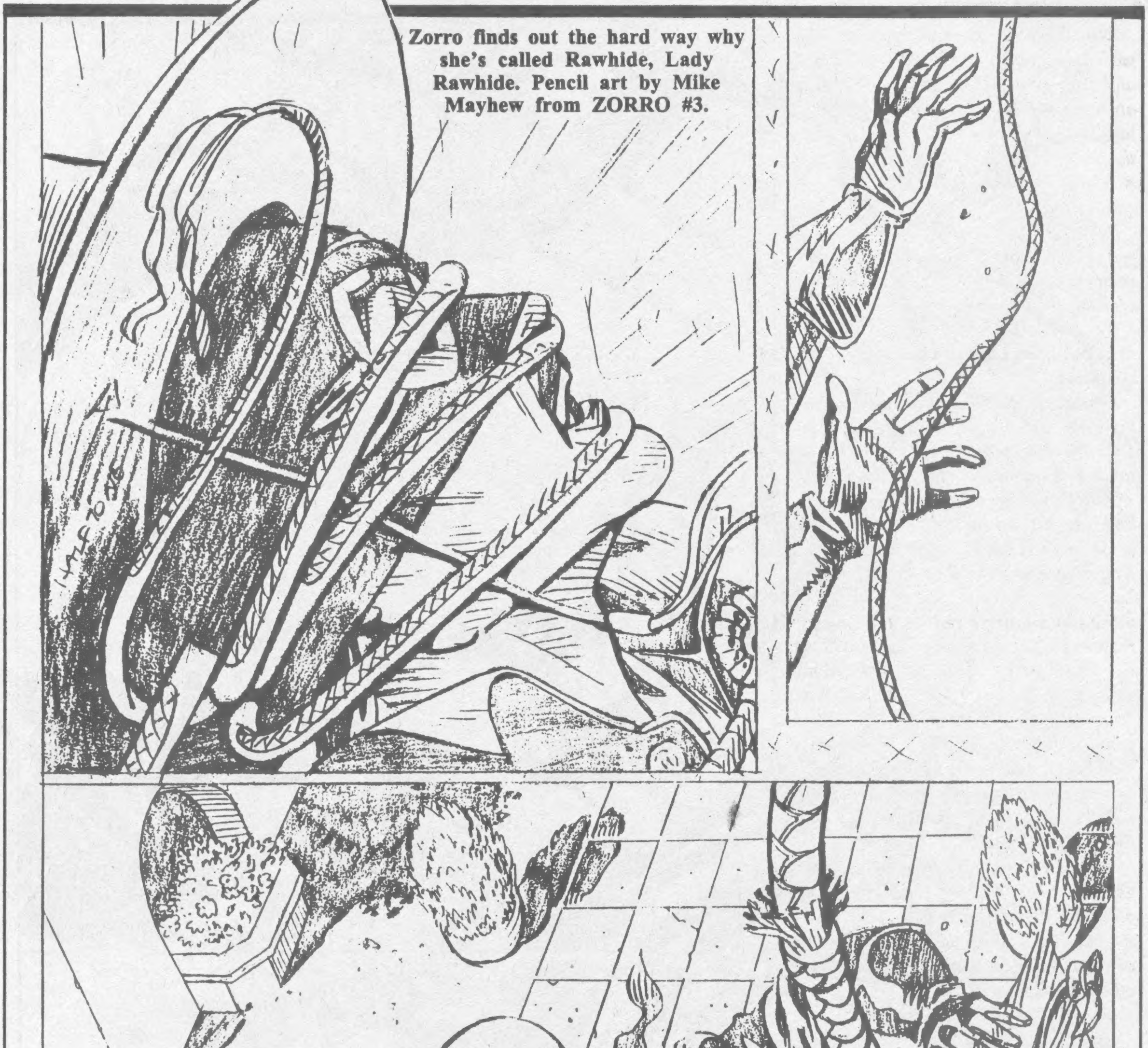
movies and TV shows, how much I didn't know.”



“Everything you need to know about comics



Zorro finds out the hard way why she’s called Rawhide, Lady Rawhide. Pencil art by Mike Mayhew from ZORRO #3.

is right in this one office o ’s.”

Well, there are several reasons. The most important one, which both Dave and Don gave me, was that Don had always wanted to visit Screamer Mountain in Georgia for a vacation, and do the definitive Don McGregor interview with his old friend. At least, that was the game plan.

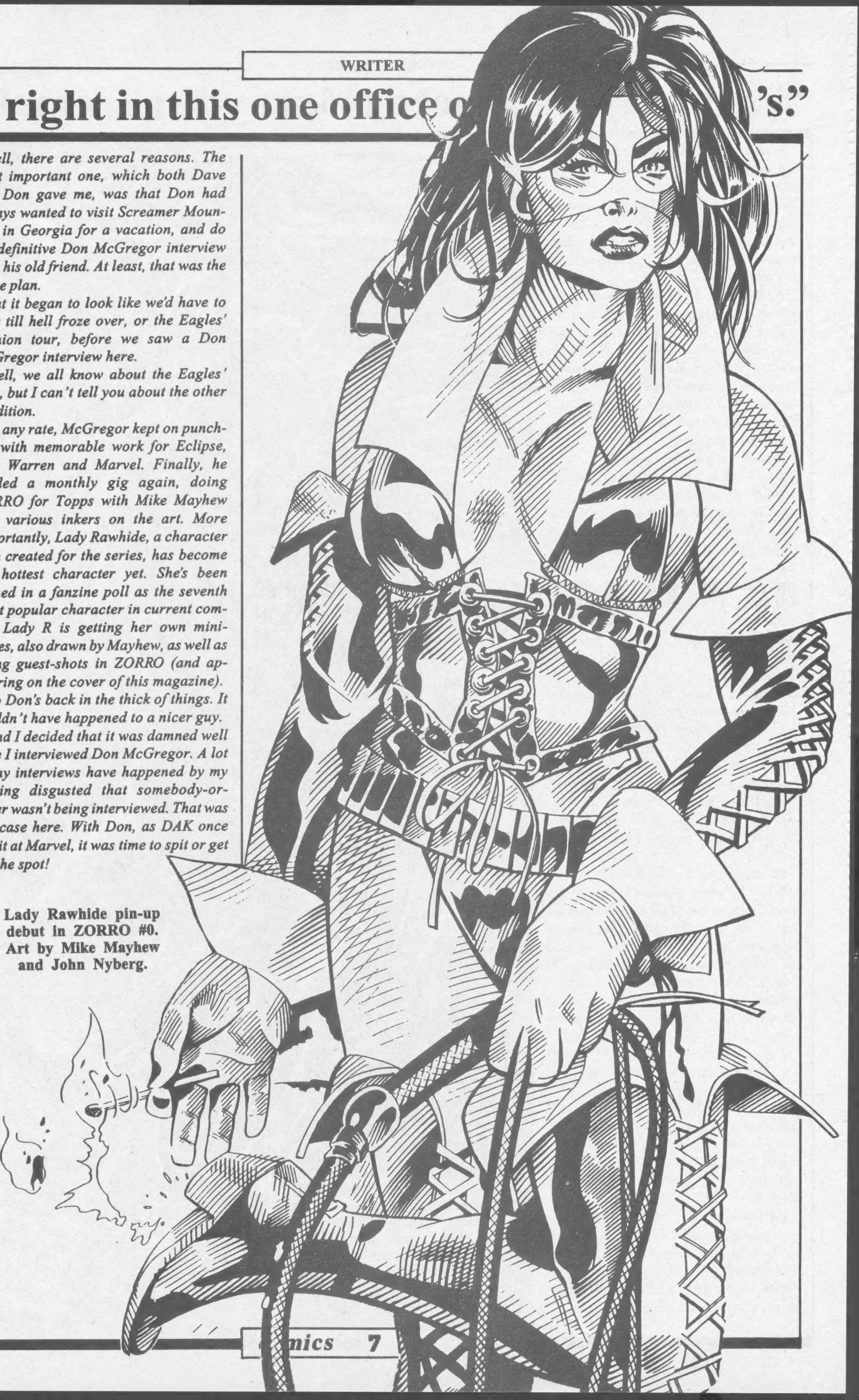
But it began to look like we'd have to wait till hell froze over, or the Eagles' reunion tour, before we saw a Don McGregor interview here.

Well, we all know about the Eagles' tour, but I can't tell you about the other condition.

At any rate, McGregor kept on punching with memorable work for Eclipse, DC, Warren and Marvel. Finally, he landed a monthly gig again, doing ZORRO for Topps with Mike Mayhew and various inkers on the art. More importantly, Lady Rawhide, a character Don created for the series, has become his hottest character yet. She's been named in a fanzine poll as the seventh most popular character in current comics. Lady R is getting her own miniseries, also drawn by Mayhew, as well as doing guest-shots in ZORRO (and appearing on the cover of this magazine).

So Don's back in the thick of things. It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

And I decided that it was damned well time I interviewed Don McGregor. A lot of my interviews have happened by my getting disgusted that somebody-or-other wasn't being interviewed. That was the case here. With Don, as DAK once put it at Marvel, it was time to spit or get off the spot!



Lady Rawhide pin-up debut in ZORRO #0. Art by Mike Mayhew and John Nyberg.

"And may a camel spit on your sister!"

It took a considerable amount of romancing to get Don to agree to the sessions, somewhere around six weeks. Telephone calls flew between myself, Don, Dave, and Jim Salicrup at Topps. But eventually, everybody concluded that yes, it would be a good thing to do the interview.

By that time, I'd had some awfully fun phone conversations with Don already, and gotten to like him quite a bit. (I hope the same is true on his end!) So we agreed to three marathon sessions to cover his quarter-century career in comics. And we both nearly got cauliflower ears from holding the phone receiver against them.

And hey, it was a lot of fun!

Don himself is as emotional and passionate and verbose as his writing. A lot of that comes thru here, even in cold type. Many times, I could sense the anger, passion, love, frustration, regret, humor, or triumph in his heart over a specific incident he was recalling. I knew that, for him, the emotion would be called up automatically by the memory. And very little of it would be dulled by time.

What else can I say? I've liked Don's writing an awful lot, from that first Killraven comic to the present. That includes his Black Panther tales, SABRE, DETECTIVES, INC., NATHANIEL DUSK, RAGAMUFFINS, his many Warren stories, his tales in ECLIPSE MAGAZINE, and, of course, his ZORRO series. Look for his JAMES BOND series for Dark Horse appearing soon. I know I will.

It's true Don's had his detractors, and neither he nor I would claim that his work is unflawed. Whose is? But for me (and DAK, and many others) his considerable strengths outweigh the flaws. And his belief in pure, unalloyed heroism is one hell of a refreshing trait in an age of cynical scripters. To a large extent, it seems to be a trait he carries into his personal life.

I'm glad to have met Don.

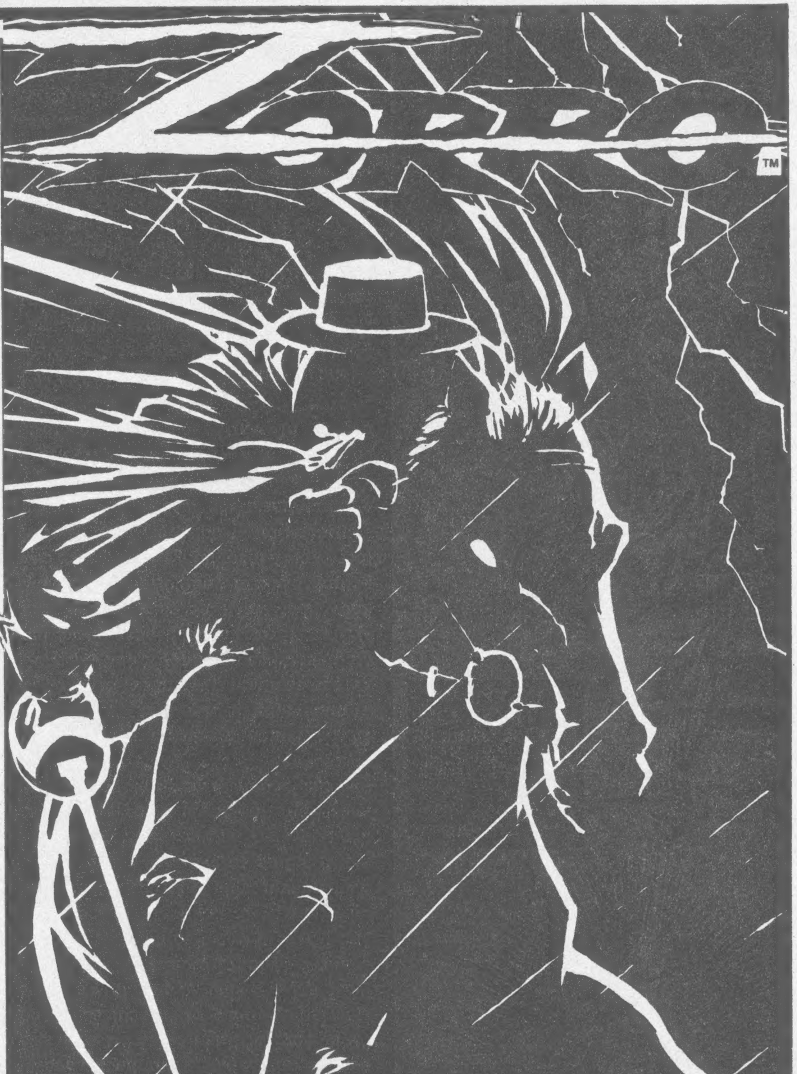
I think you'll like this interview . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *First off, we're gonna start out with ZORRO — and why not? I'm glad to see you back in the arena.*

DON McGREGOR: ZORRO! Yes! What do you want to know about ZORRO?

LOU: *Everything! We want to know everything about ZORRO! So that everything you ever wanted to know about ZORRO will be on this one tape.*

DON: And I'll never have another thing to say about ZORRO in my whole life.



Zorro cover art by Frank Miller. "It put me in mind of Frank's recasting of the Batman origin, in which young Bruce Wayne and his parents have just come out of a theatre which is showing a ZORRO movie."

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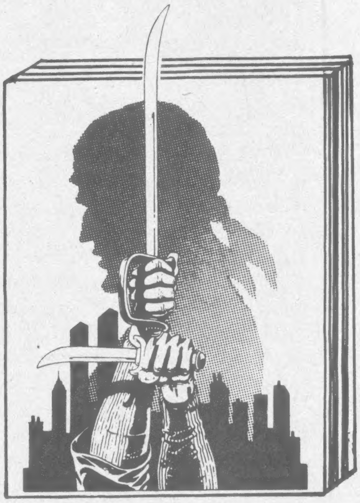
DRAGONFLAME

And Other Bedtime Nightmares

by Don McGregor



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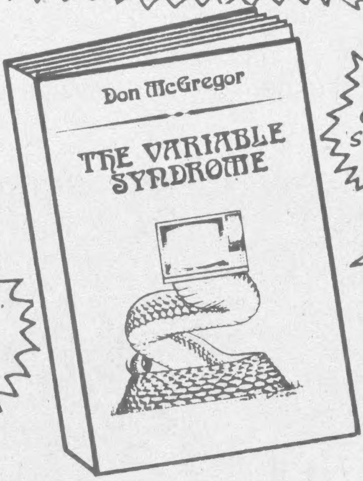

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"Zorro is really a character that I loved."

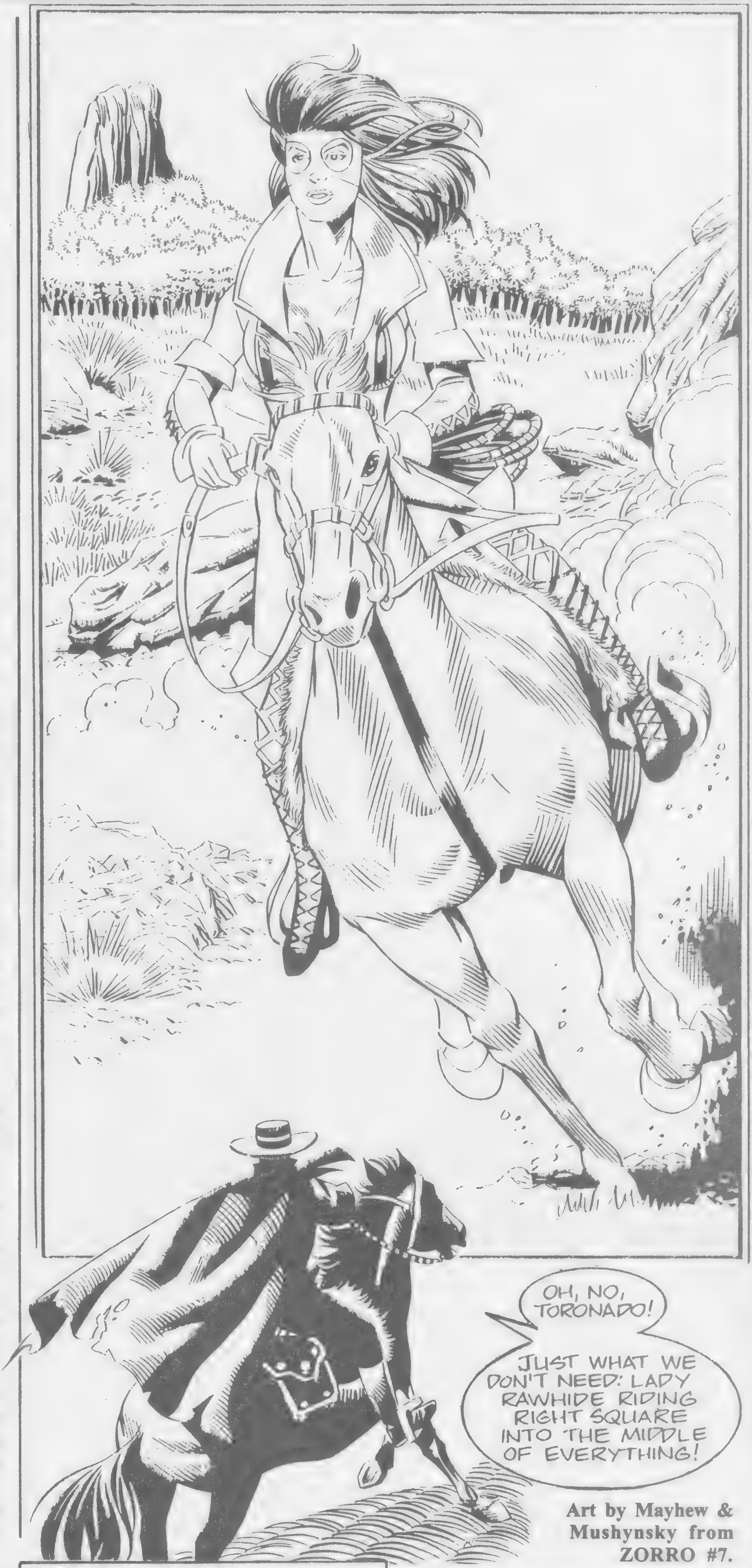
LOU: *That's right!*
DON: Until next month! *(Laughter.)*
LOU: *But let me repeat that I'm glad to see you back on the stands with ZORRO at Topps, because you've been too long away.*
DON: Thank you very much.
LOU: *I'll start by asking you if you watched ZORRO on TV with Guy Madison way back in the '50s.*
DON: **Guy Madison** was Wild Bill Hickock. **Guy Williams** was Zorro. If we're gonna start with this, let me preface it by saying that when I grew up, watching **Guy Williams** as Zorro, I absolutely loved him. And to me, he's probably still the definitive Zorro, just in terms of capturing the attitude of the character.

That real gay nonchalance, that quick, wry smile that just has a certain warmth and energy to it.

I know there are gonna be a lot of people who say, "Well, **Douglas Fairbanks** is better," and such. And certainly, **Fairbanks'** stuntwork in THE MARK OF ZORRO is wonderful. And I loved the Republic serials, especially with **Yakima Canutt** doing a lot of the stuntwork for Zorro.

But I'm most fond of Guy, because of the accessibility he brought to the character. When I was watching those shows — and it was the same way when I was back in my teens, reading **Ian Fleming's** James Bond — that kid who lived in the state of Rhode Island could never have imagined that he'd be writing these characters years later. If you'd said, "You know, one of these days, somebody's gonna come to you and ask you to write a James Bond comic, or a Zorro comic," that would have been the same thing as saying, "And you're gonna take a flight to the Moon."
LOU: (Laughter.)
DON: It is still a part of me now, so that when people come to me and say, "Would you write a JAMES BOND comic? Would you write ZORRO?", that part of me is sitting in disbelief, saying, "I'm gonna get a chance to write Zorro? I'm gonna get a chance to write this character I've loved for all these years?" That part of me is really taken, surprised by all that, and loves the fact that you get to work on the character you have loved so long and so dearly.

At the same time, taking the business reality of it: When Topps Comics editor **Jim Salicrup** first came to me and talked about doing a ZORRO project, the first thing you had to consider was, "Well, how many companies are we dealing with here?" For instance, with JAMES BOND


OH, NO, TORONADO!
JUST WHAT WE DON'T NEED: LADY RAWHIDE RIDING RIGHT SQUARE INTO THE MIDDLE OF EVERYTHING!

Art by Mayhew & Mushynsky from ZORRO #7.

"For fans there will be a character directly attribut-

you're really dealing with three companies. There's Acme Comics, which owns the comics publishing rights to the character. And there's also Glidrose, which owns the licensing to James Bond. And then there's Dark Horse, which is publishing JAMES BOND: THE QUASIMODO GAMBIT. So my first question is, "Well, who am I answerable to?" You could have three different sets of people who have conflicting ideas of what, or what should not, be in a James Bond comic. And the same thing could happen with Zorro — to a lesser extent, because there are only two companies involved.

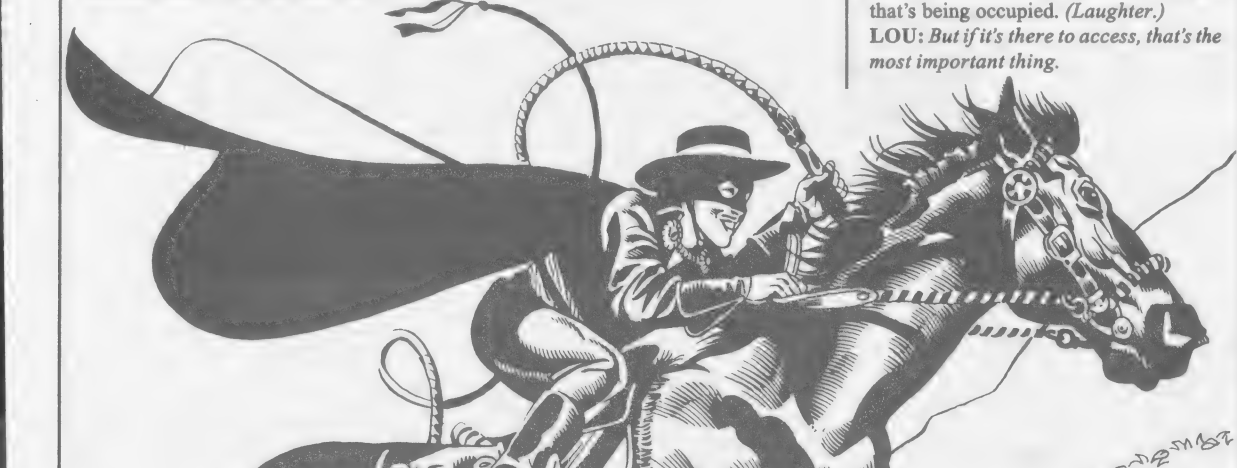
And I have to say that, first of all, with **Jim Salicrup** asking me to do the ZORRO project, because I have a great deal of love and respect for Jim, I had no hesitation that way. I know Jim, and he's just very aware of the needs of talent. He has the knack for taking potentially volatile situations and defusing them, in such an effective manner that all the talent doing the book feels they've been heard, what they've asked has been given consideration, and that everyone has, to some extent, gotten what they need to do the project. And believe me, when it comes down to a monthly book, things can quickly get very volatile. There's all kinds of things that can come up.

And Jim has a real knack for making people feel that they are wanted there, and giving them the positive energy they need in order to be able to do the project. Why Marvel Comics ever let **Jim Salicrup** go is beyond me, because he knows media so well, and loves comics so much, that he's certainly a big plus for Topps to have. Somebody who has his acumen in this business is invaluable.

LOU: *Also, since Topps is primarily an adaptation company, I imagine he is somewhat familiar with the problems you do encounter translating something from other media into the comic-book form?*

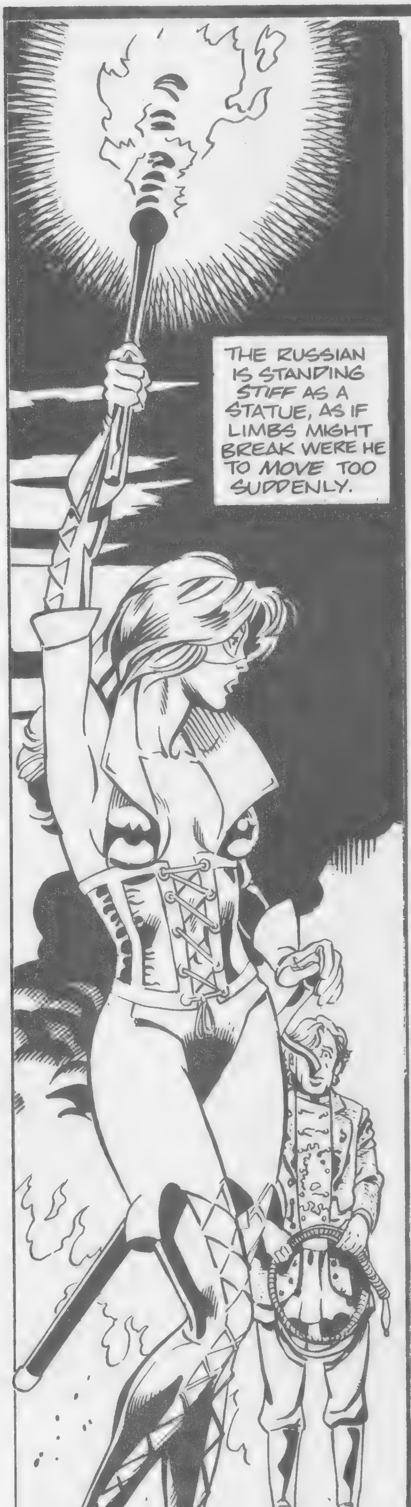
DON: Well, Jim has a knowledge of the media that I certainly don't. And I'm talking in terms of trends that are happening, what's going on, following things. I learn more from being in Jim's presence that way, more about what's outside the business of writing. 'Cause the business side and the process of writing, those are two whole different arenas. When you sit and face that blank sheet of paper, Lou, that's a totally different situation than anything that goes on on the outside, including doing this interview. And it's very clear in my mind that it's a different part of the brain that's being occupied, and a different part of **Don McGregor** that's being occupied. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *But if it's there to access, that's the most important thing.*



Unpublished splash page for ZORRO #12, pencilled & inked by Mike Mayhew.

able to the Johnston McCulley Zorro novels.”


THE RUSSIAN IS STANDING STIFF AS A STATUE, AS IF LIMBS MIGHT BREAK WERE HE TO *MOVE* TOO SUDDENLY.

DON: Well, if you just sit down at the typewriter, there's absolutely nothing there. And you have to create all the characters. “What is this book about?” “Why am I writing it?” “What am I, as a storyteller, giving to an audience? And what am I giving to people who love comics?” And if I profess to love comics and I have devoted so much of my creative energy to comics over the years, then I damn well better have something worth telling an audience and giving to the story. Giving the story some weight and texture, looking at all the possibilities that can be done with the story and these characters.

LOU: *Which is certainly a different attitude than if you said, “Okay, I'm here to do about six issues of ZORRO, so let's get down and hack it out.”*

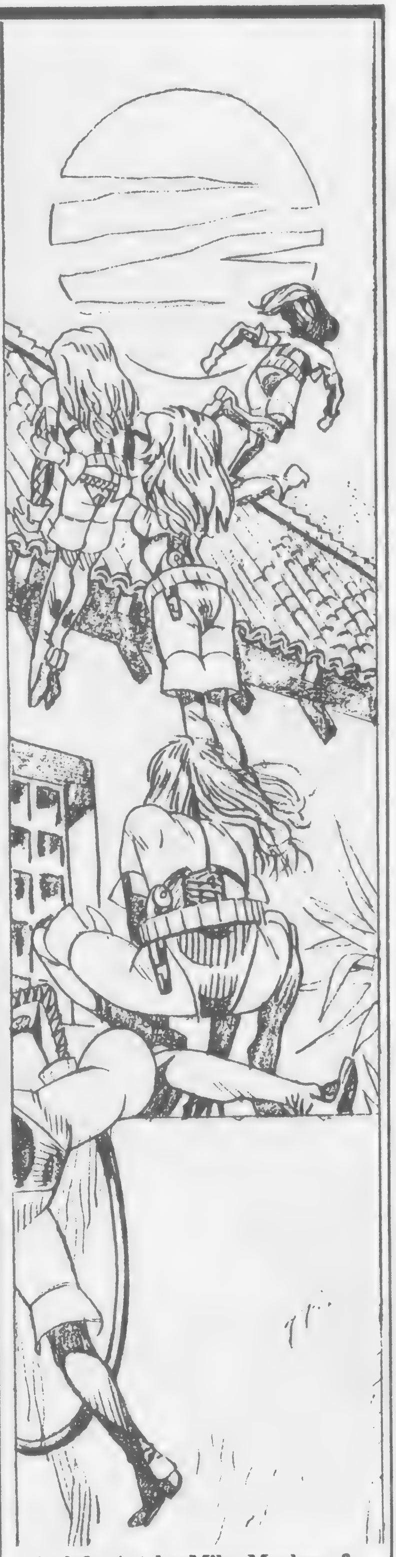
DON: Never gonna happen. And Jim knew that when he came to me. But getting back to your original question, there were a lot of things I had to take into consideration. And everything worked out. In terms of the licensing department, Zorro Productions is just great. I had a chance to meet with **John Gertz,** who's the head of Zorro Productions, a month or so after I said I would do the series.

John is one of the most honest guys and likeable men you could meet. He's very knowledgeable about Zorro, very concerned about the character — and not just on a merchandising level. He has a fondness for the character and an enthusiasm for it, so that when you're talking with him about the character, there's a very real love for Zorro.

Also, John's wife **Sandra Curtis,** who also works at Zorro Productions, was very helpful in getting me historical reference material. Because it's very hard to find material that is germane to Southern California history in the late 1700s/early 1800s out here in New York. I'm not saying *none* of it exists, but it's not extensive! *(Laughter.)* They had a lot of material, and were very kind in shipping it up to me.

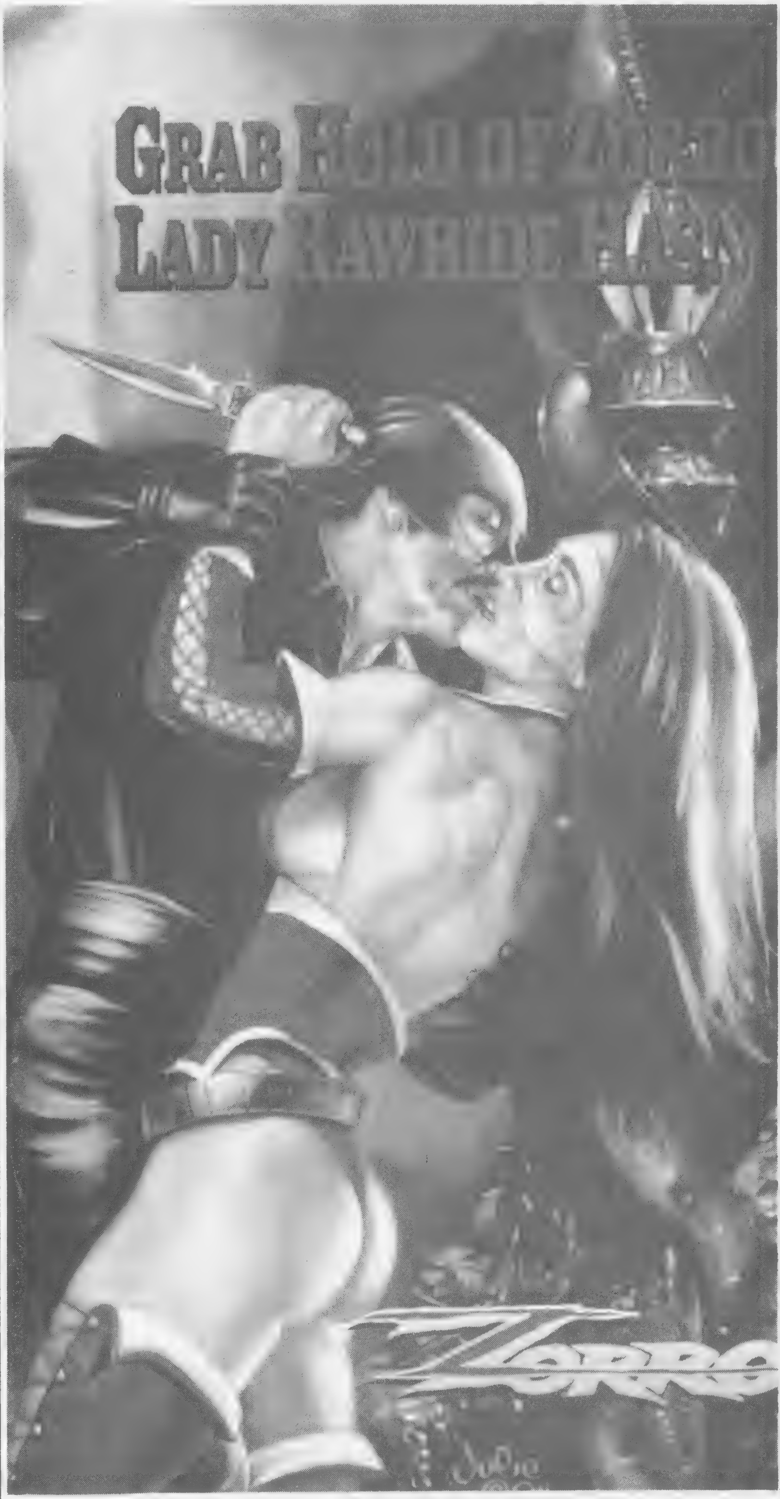
When you first look at the reference material, you don't know *what* you're looking for. I realized suddenly, even though I'd watched all those ZORRO movies and TV shows, how much I really didn't know about the time period. What's the difference between a pueblo town and the Presidio? What's the nomenclature for the military, and what is the political hierarchy of the time? There was so much to learn.

So I am continually going over books, and having material right out before me when I am writing those scripts, to make



At left: Art by Mike Mayhew & Jimmy Palmiotti from the forthcoming LADY RAWHIDE mini-series. Above: Pencils by Mayhew from ZORRO #3.

“Bob Kane said that Zorro was one of the



Above: Hot cover art by Julie Bell for ZORRO #10. On next page: Wraparound cover painting by Joeseph Michael Linsner for ZORRO #11. A true “Linsner Tart,” for all you Austrian pastry aficionados.

them as accurate as I can in the process of telling as exciting a Zorro story as we can.

But let me go back to what you asked me in the beginning, because one of the factors was the thing about doing a monthly book — coming back and doing a monthly series. There's a lot of pluses to doing a monthly series, obviously. It really gets you before the public eye in a way that doing a mini-series probably won't, because it's there all the time. If you're doing a four-issue mini-series, almost by the time that the audience has become aware that there's a book out there, the series is finished.

LOU: *Right, exactly.*

DON: So in terms of the distributors, in terms of the stores, and in terms of the readers, it's very difficult for them to maintain a following on that. Because by the time they get there, that fourth book is already finishing up the storyline.

LOU: *They've only got four shots to get you, and that's it?*

DON: Exactly.

LOU: *And by the time the reviews come out, the thing will probably be gone.*

DON: Right. Not that I see that many of the reviews, but Jim makes me much more aware of what's going on. I think that the press that follows what's going on in comics — there's a lot more of that around these days than existed back in the early '80s or the '70s, there's more magazines coming out all the time. Once again, Jim keeps me well informed on them. I mean, I wasn't aware. “What is this? What magazine is this? You want me to do what, where, for who?” So now I'm well-versed on all the magazines! Jim has them all in his office. Sometimes, I do this kind of Carnac the Magician act that **Johnny Carson** used to do, like, “Everything! Everything you might need to know about comics is right here in this one office of **Jim Salicrup's**, and you don't have to leave, because it's all here!”

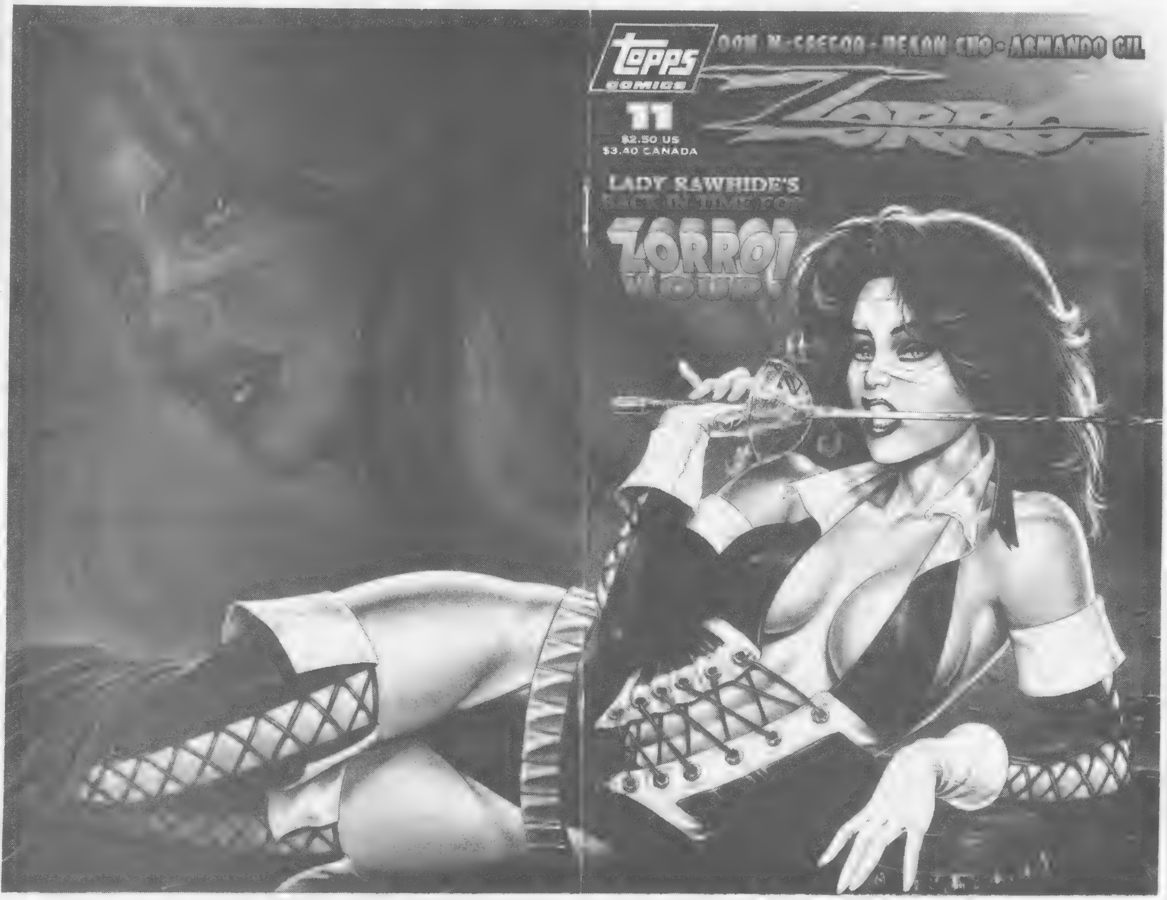
LOU: *“You are wrong, fallen-whale breath!”* (Laughter.)

DON: And may a camel spit on your sister!

LOU: *May a sacred yak leave a holy relic on your front lawn!* (Laughter.)

DON: But when Jim first asked me that question, the determining part was, did I want to come back to the grind of a monthly book? Because, you know, *(sigh)* I've *been* there. And I know that doing a regular series, it's *always* there. Once you say “yes” to this, it becomes a phenomenal part of your life. You're always thinking about it; it's always there with you.

influences in the creation of Batman.”



So ZORRO is gonna really go suddenly from a character that I loved — I still watch the shows and the Republic serials; I have them on videotape — to being a major part of my life, and a daily part of my life. That's a major decision to make. It impacts not only on me, but my family, as well. My lovely wife, Marsha, now is intimate with Zorro, in a way she could never have imagined. And, of course, she's my Lady Rawhide.

I seldom tell her much in advance of the book's publication. You can become obsessed with this business and bore the hell out of your loved ones. So while she's aware of what series I'm working on, she doesn't have most of the specifics until the book comes out. Before we met, Marsha didn't have a lot of exposure to pop culture; she read the classics. She's an actress and she loved **Shakespeare** and **Tennessee Williams,** and I came along and corrupted her with comic books and old TV shows like I SPY and ROUTE 66 and THE AVENGERS.

LOU: *Had you read the Johnston McCulley novels before you took on this task? If you have, you're one up on me.*

DON: Yeah, again thanks to Zorro Productions. I asked them if they would send me up some of the **Johnston McCulley** material. So I did read them, as part of the process, before I actually started writing any books. I read everything I could about the character, and watched the ZORRO shows again, immersing myself in the character. I read the early California history, which I told you about. There was a lot of research like that.

And reference is made, for people who are fans of the **McCulley** Zorro, to his novels. There will be a character in the upcoming series that will be directly attributable to the **Johnston McCulley** Zorro novels.

LOU: *I've got a batch of ZORRO issues in front of me as we talk, and one of the things that strikes me is the covers for #1 and #2. The first one is done by Frank Miller, and on the second one we've got a Batman-like presentation of Zorro, with a cape that looks something like Batman's, billowing out behind him. It put me in mind of Frank's recasting of the Batman origin, in which young Bruce Wayne and his parents, who are about to get shot by Joe Chill, have just come out of a theater which is showing a ZORRO movie.*

DON: Well, it's my understanding that **Bob Kane** said that Zorro was one of the influences he had in the creation of Batman.

LOU: *Yeah. The gang he belonged to as a kid was called the Zorros.*

DON: Right. So, again, one of the considerations in taking on this thing was not so much revamping Zorro, because I think his character is fine. There's nothing that needs to be done to him. He's a great character. There's a reason why Zorro has been popular over all these decades. Scarcely a decade has gone by in which Zorro has not been featured in either movies or a television series. I believe there's something there that speaks to an audience of every time. And that's one of the things I knew when I was taking on this book, that it must speak to people of today, not just be about the concerns of people in the early 1800s in southern California.

But there are certain things that affect human beings that I think are universal,

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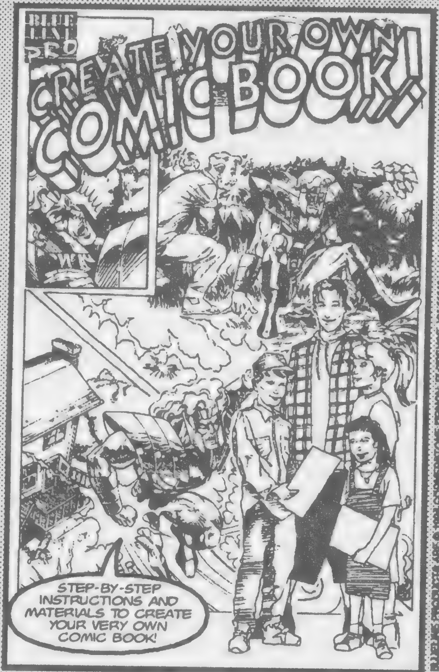
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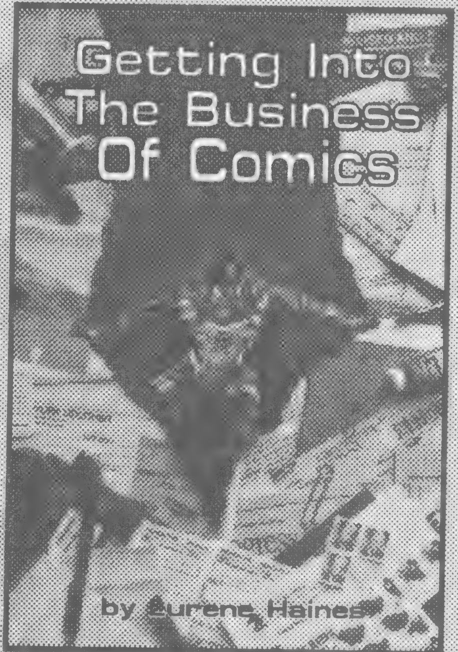

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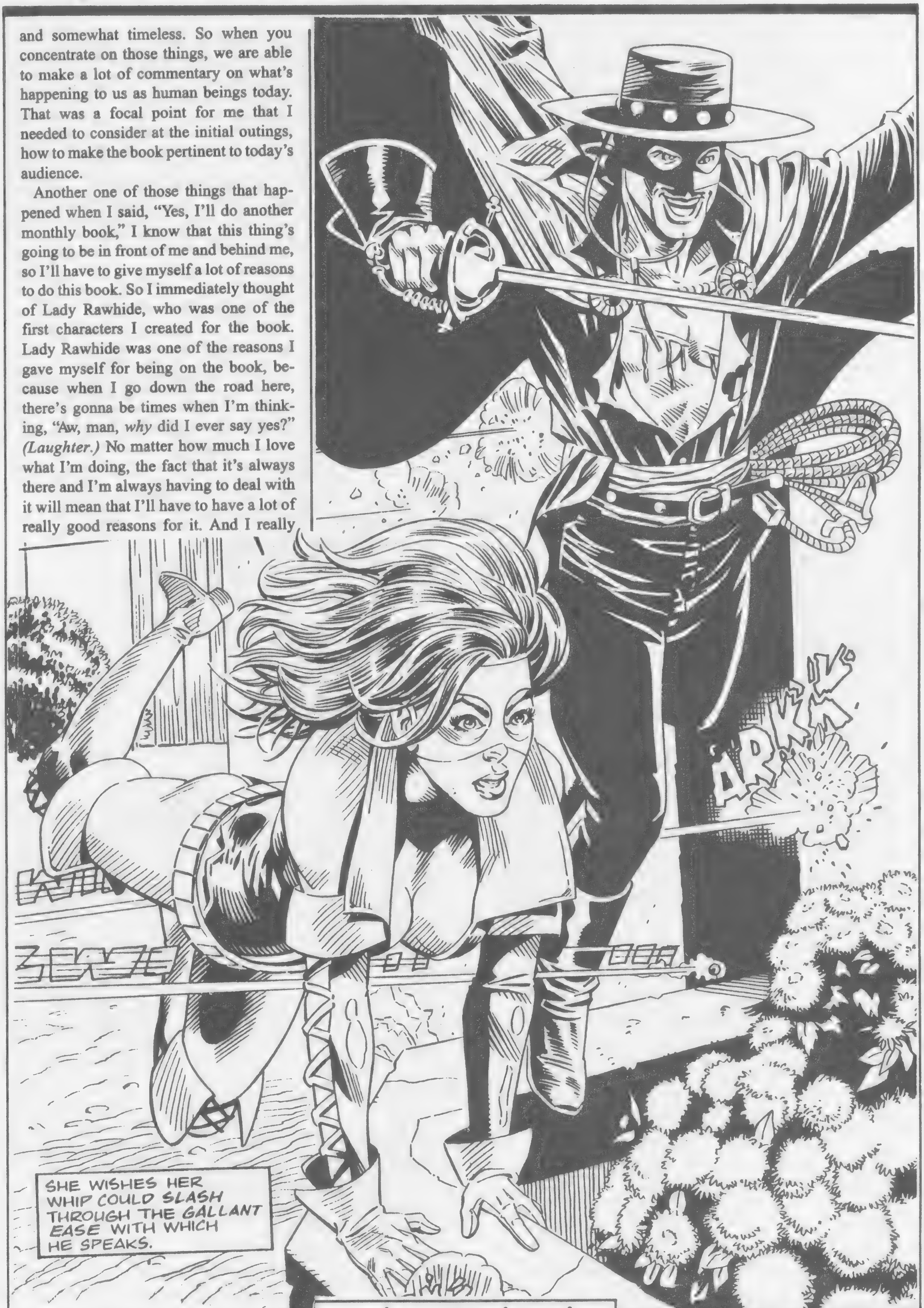
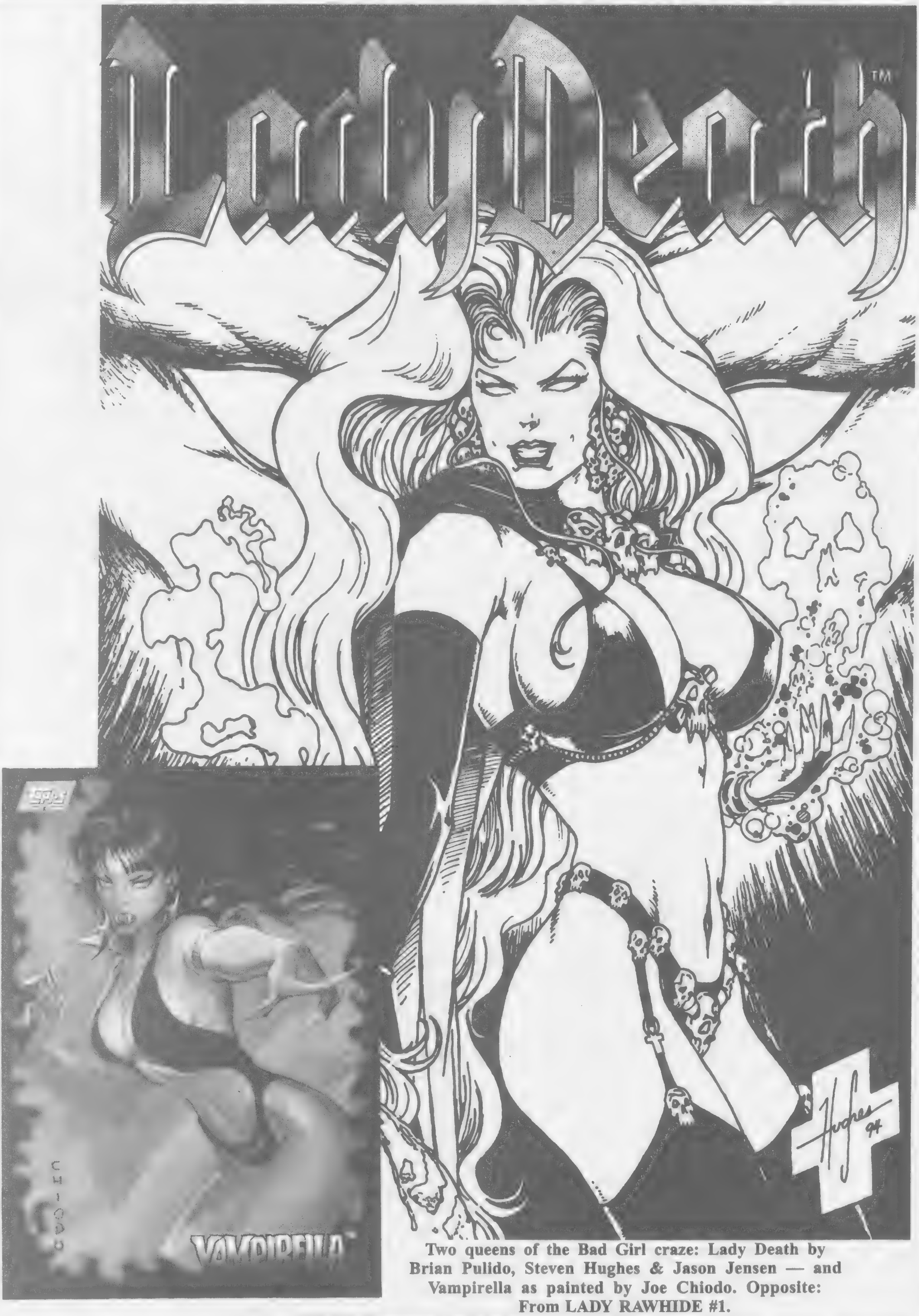
"Lady Rawhide was one of the reasons for being on the book."

and somewhat timeless. So when you concentrate on those things, we are able to make a lot of commentary on what's happening to us as human beings today. That was a focal point for me that I needed to consider at the initial outings, how to make the book pertinent to today's audience.

Another one of those things that happened when I said, "Yes, I'll do another monthly book," I know that this thing's going to be in front of me and behind me, so I'll have to give myself a lot of reasons to do this book. So I immediately thought of Lady Rawhide, who was one of the first characters I created for the book. Lady Rawhide was one of the reasons I gave myself for being on the book, because when I go down the road here, there's gonna be times when I'm thinking, "Aw, man, *why* did I ever say yes?" *(Laughter.)* No matter how much I love what I'm doing, the fact that it's always there and I'm always having to deal with it will mean that I'll have to have a lot of really good reasons for it. And I really


SHE WISHES HER WHIP COULD *SLASH* THROUGH THE *GALLANT EASE* WITH WHICH HE SPEAKS.
ARKK

“Lady Rawhide had nothing to do with the bad-


Lady Death™
Hughes 94
Topps
CHIODO
VAMPIRELLA

Two queens of the Bad Girl craze: Lady Death by Brian Pulido, Steven Hughes & Jason Jensen — and Vampirella as painted by Joe Chiodo. Opposite: From LADY RAWHIDE #1.

Vampirella ® & © 1995 by Harris Publications. Lady Death TM & © 1995 Brian Pulido.

girl craze. That didn't exist when I created her.”

wanted to have some women characters in this book so I wouldn't always have to be writing about guys. And I wanted women characters who wouldn't have to run out of the scene when the action started. So that's really the reason for the birth of Lady Rawhide. And we're talking about maybe two and a half, three years ago.

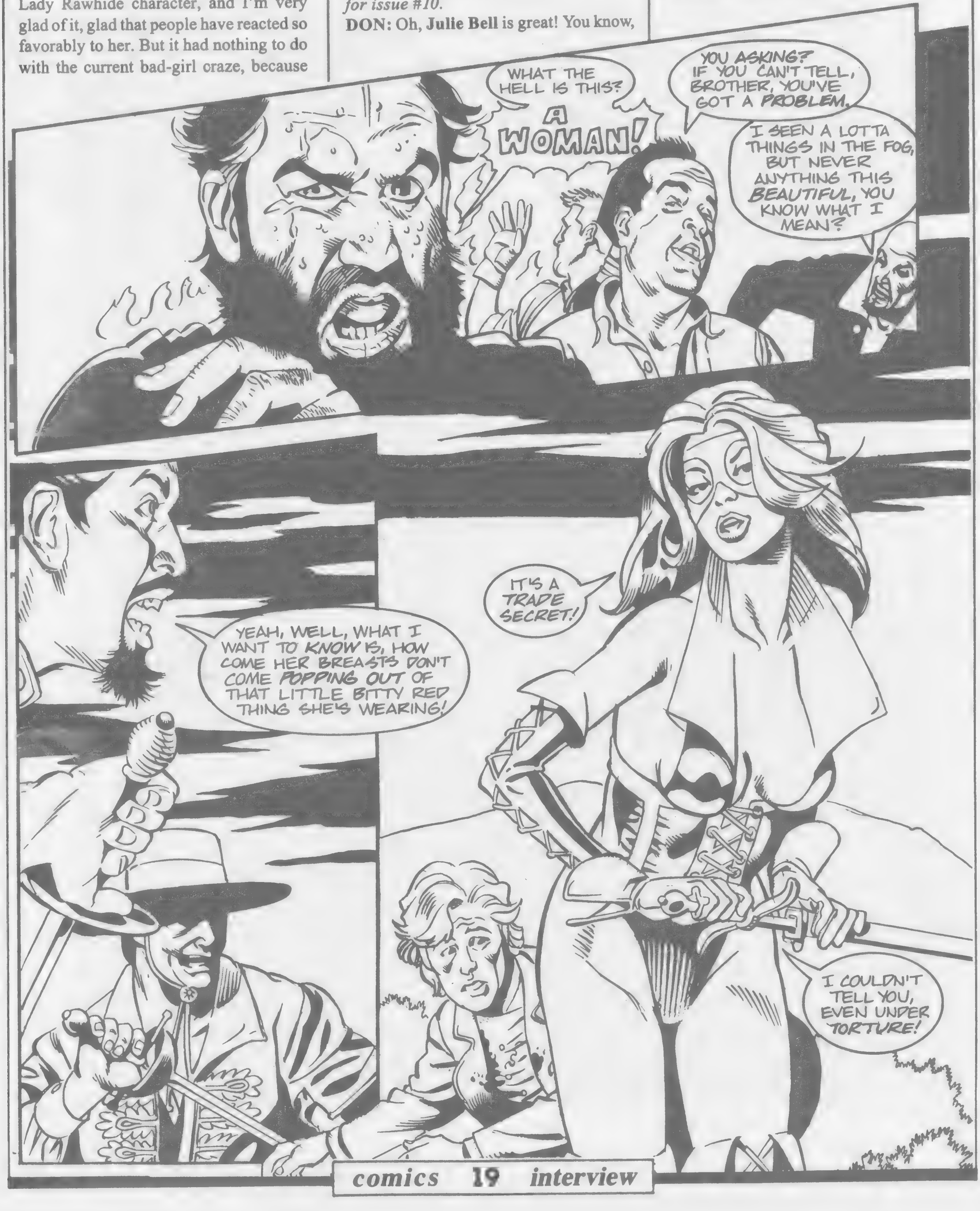
So *now* there's this big fuss about the Lady Rawhide character, and I'm very glad of it, glad that people have reacted so favorably to her. But it had nothing to do with the current bad-girl craze, because that craze didn't exist when I created her. It was just that I really wanted to make sure we had some women characters in the strip, and there will be others besides her as the book goes along. That way I wouldn't always have to have guys hangin' around together. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *I like Lady Rawhide quite a bit. In fact, I love the cover that Julie Bell did for issue #10.*

DON: Oh, **Julie Bell** is great! You know, that woman, she is not only talented, and intelligent, and beautiful —

LOU: *I'll take your word for it.*

DON: — all three in one person, with a great sense of humor! And so is her husband, Boris, by the way. Boris is also talented, intelligent and beautiful, in his own right. I told both Jim and **Dwight Zimmerman**, the ZORRO editor, that I


WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?
A WOMAN!
YOU ASKING? IF YOU CAN'T TELL, BROTHER, YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM.
I SEEN A LOTTA THINGS IN THE FOG, BUT NEVER ANYTHING THIS BEAUTIFUL, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
YEAH, WELL, WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS, HOW COME HER BREASTS DON'T COME POPPING OUT OF THAT LITTLE BITTY RED THING SHE'S WEARING!
IT'S A TRADE SECRET!
I COULDN'T TELL YOU, EVEN UNDER TORTURE!

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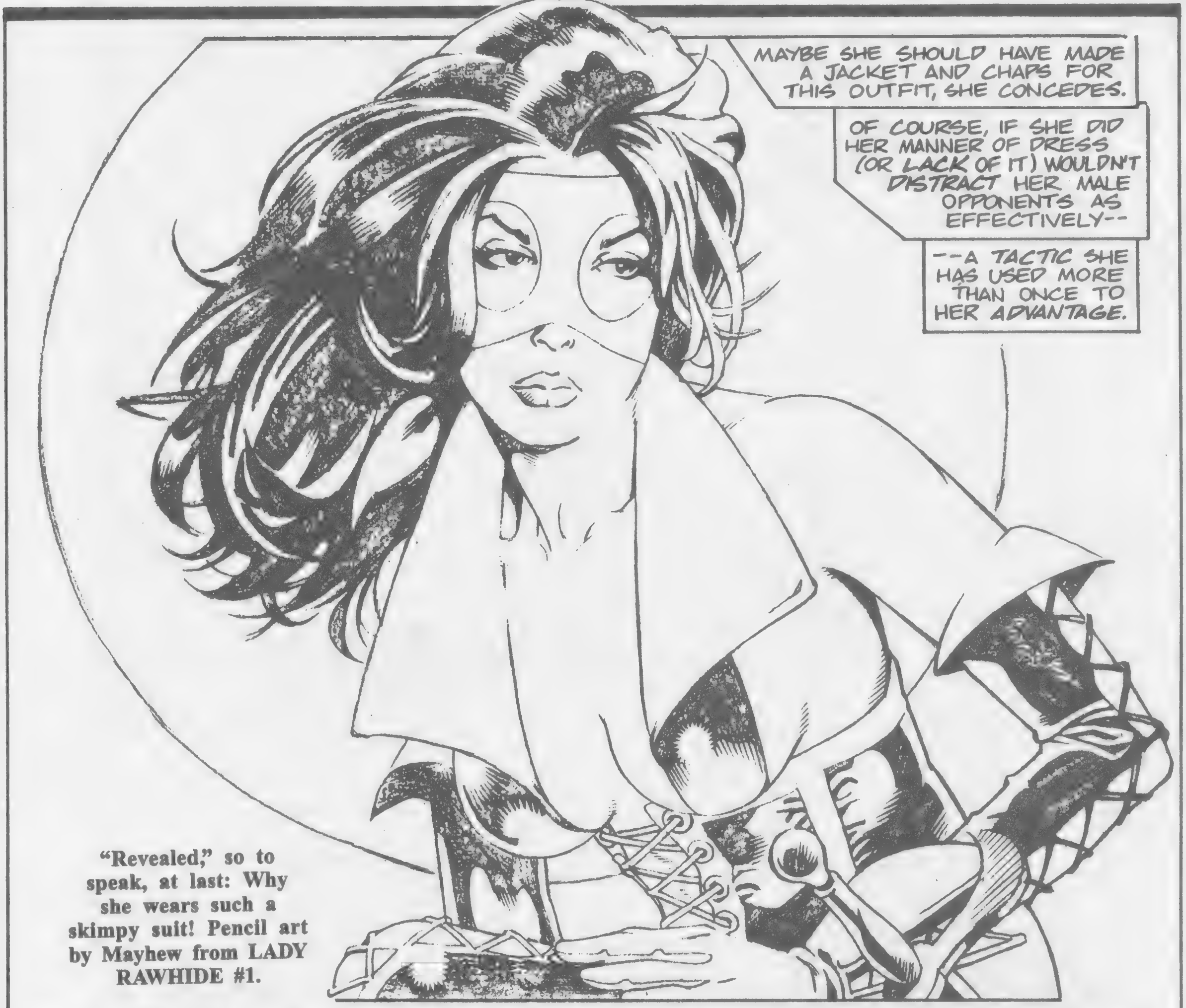
"In Zorro's time, that costume would be way outta line!"


MAYBE SHE SHOULD HAVE MADE A JACKET AND CHAPS FOR THIS OUTFIT, SHE CONCEDES.
OF COURSE, IF SHE DID HER MANNER OF DRESS (OR *LACK* OF IT) WOULDN'T *DISTRACT* HER MALE OPPONENTS AS EFFECTIVELY--
--A *TACTIC* SHE HAS USED MORE THAN ONCE TO HER *ADVANTAGE*.

"Revealed," so to speak, at last: Why she wears such a skimpy suit! Pencil art by Mayhew from LADY RAWHIDE #1.

think she should be the first to do a *second* ZORRO cover.

LOU: *Ah, that would be great.*

DON: Yeah, I think it would be cool.

LOU: *The only real problem I have with Lady Rawhide is the anachronism of the costume. It would be really great for a heroine in the present day, you know —*

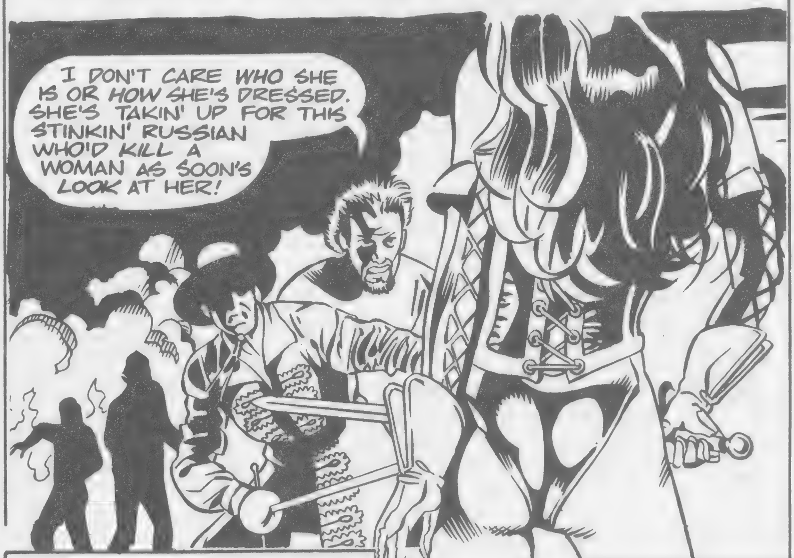
DON: Oh, really? In her day, it was dirt and dust you'd fall onto rather than cement. That kinda costume today, aw, man, you'd skin your knees up so bad!

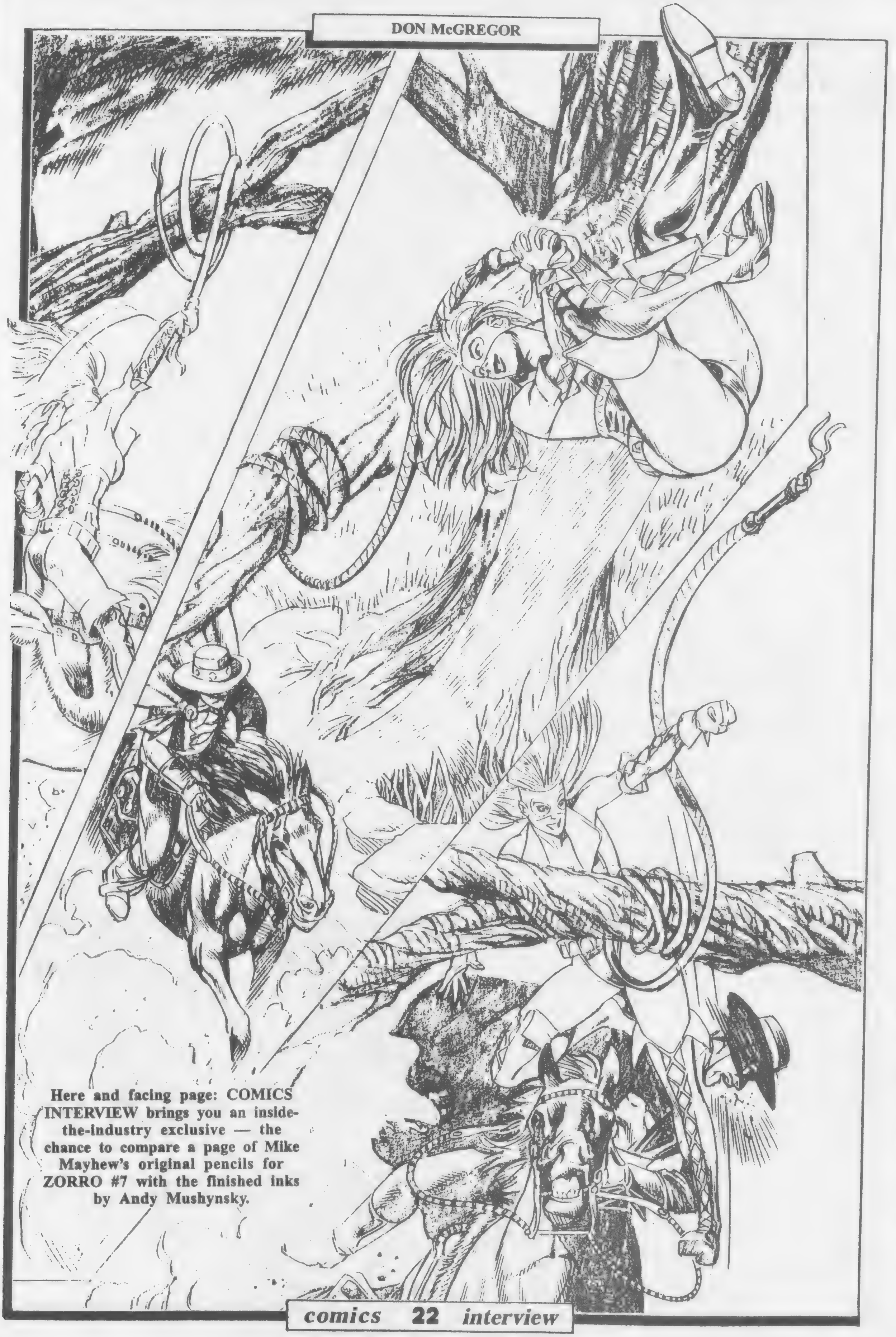
LOU: *Yes!* (Laughter.)

DON: So let me see if I understand you right. Back in Zorro's time, that costume would be way outta line! But for today, it would be okay! *(Laughter.)*

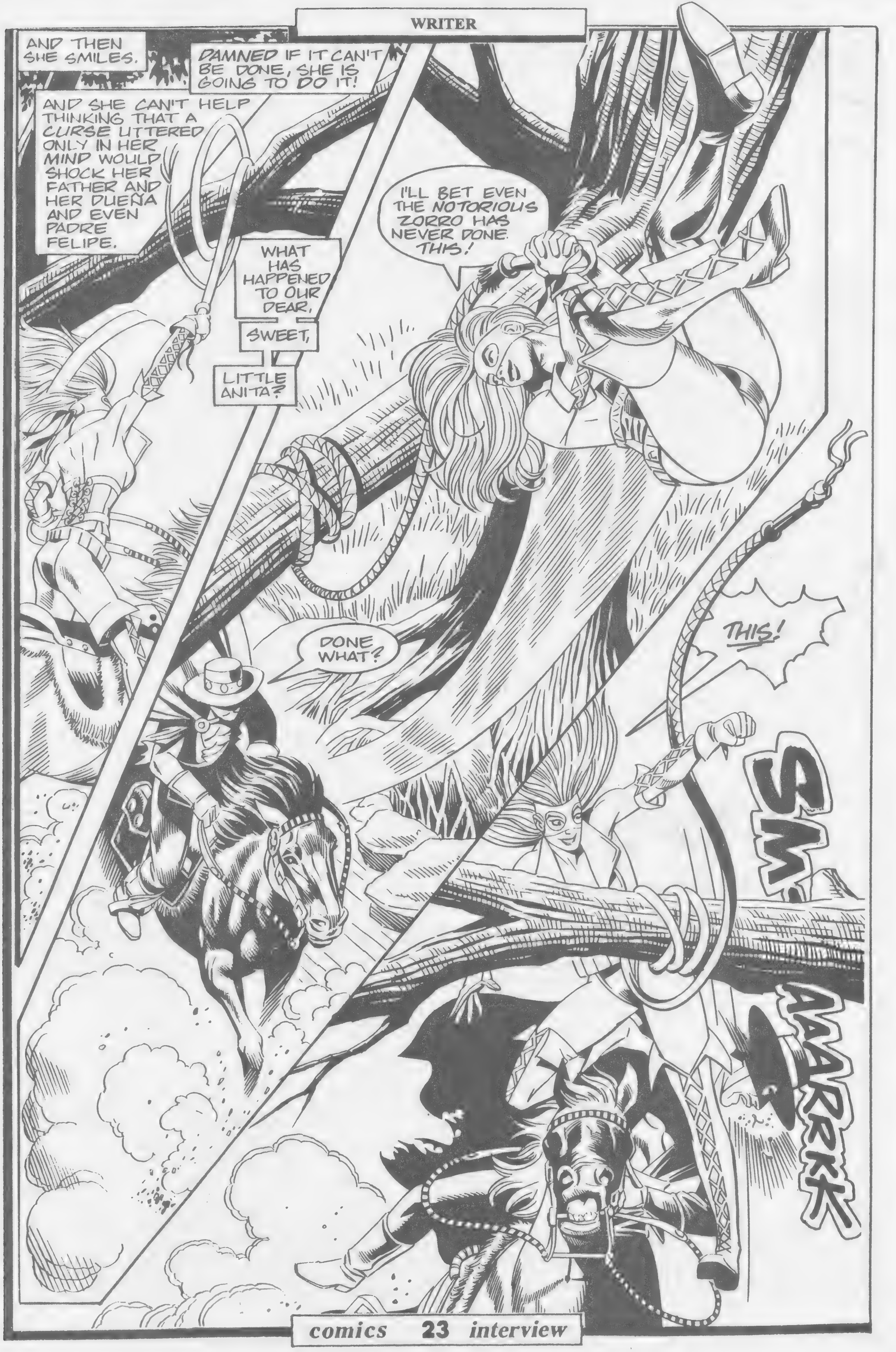
LOU: *But nobody's put in any gripes about it!*

DON: By the way, Lou, here's part of your job during this interview. Remind me never to be facetious in print! If you start to be facetious in print, you know what happens then? That's the kind of stuff **David Anthony Kraft** loves to take, and he isolates it and puts it in big, bold letters, up on the top of the page *(laughter from both)*, and it sounds like you're being totally serious, and you read it and go, *"Oh, no!!" (Laughter.)* "Oh, people are reading that!" *Oh, wow!!* And you know there are going to be some people who read that, take as gospel, and

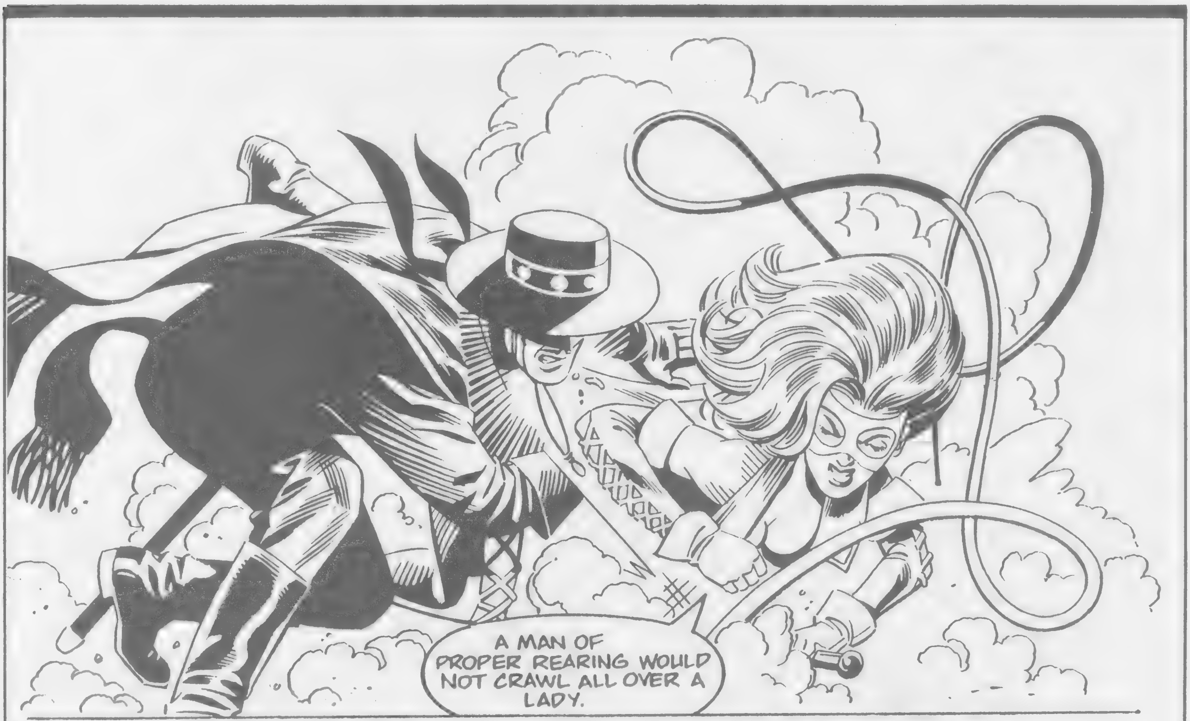

I DON'T CARE WHO SHE IS OR HOW SHE'S DRESSED. SHE'S TAKIN' UP FOR THIS STINKIN' RUSSIAN WHO'D KILL A WOMAN AS SOON'S LOOK AT HER!



Here and facing page: COMICS INTERVIEW brings you an inside-the-industry exclusive — the chance to compare a page of Mike Mayhew's original pencils for ZORRO #7 with the finished inks by Andy Mushynsky.


AND THEN SHE SMILES.
DAMNED IF IT CAN'T BE DONE, SHE IS GOING TO DO IT!
AND SHE CAN'T HELP THINKING THAT A CURSE UTTERED ONLY IN HER MIND WOULD SHOCK HER FATHER AND HER DUEÑA AND EVEN PADRE FELIPE.
WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO OUR DEAR,
SWEET,
LITTLE ANITA?
I'LL BET EVEN THE NOTORIOUS ZORRO HAS NEVER DONE THIS!
DONE WHAT?
THIS!
SMAAARRKK

“The woman goes on this quest because she wants to


A MAN OF PROPER REARING WOULD NOT CRAWL ALL OVER A LADY.

shake their heads saying, “I can't believe **McGregor** said that.” And there will be a few on the way who will say, “That **McGregor's** still a loose cannon.” *(Laughter.)* So I'm gonna be totally serious through this whole interview, as you can see.

LOU: *Oh, I can tell! You're being as serious as possible, right now!*

DON: Right.!

LOU: *If I could somehow indicate decibel level by typeface, I'd certainly be seeking to do that right now!* (Laughter.)

DON: Hey, you and I both know, you have to keep the show alive.

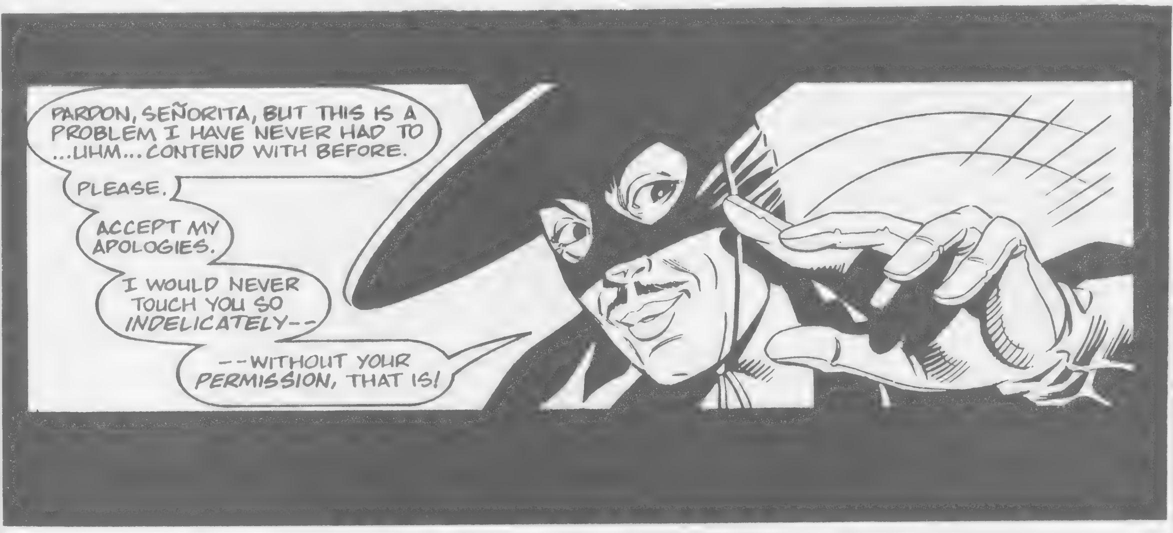
LOU: *Yeah. But about Lady R's costume, it's the same way I felt about Red Sonja's costume, that chain-metal bikini. I was saying, “Well, that's a really fun thing to draw and look at, folks, but what practical good would it be to her in a fight?”*

DON: You know, I did a series called QUESTWORLD, which you didn't see because it never saw print. It was a parody of all of those fantasy quest-type storylines. The whole reason the woman character who was trapped in this fantasy world goes on this quest is because she wants to get out of this chain-metal bra and panties. *(Laughter.)* She just wants to get into a set of jeans and a shirt! “If you get me out of these metallic panties, digging up into my crotch and butt, and into some practical clothes, I'm ready to go!” *(Laughter.)*

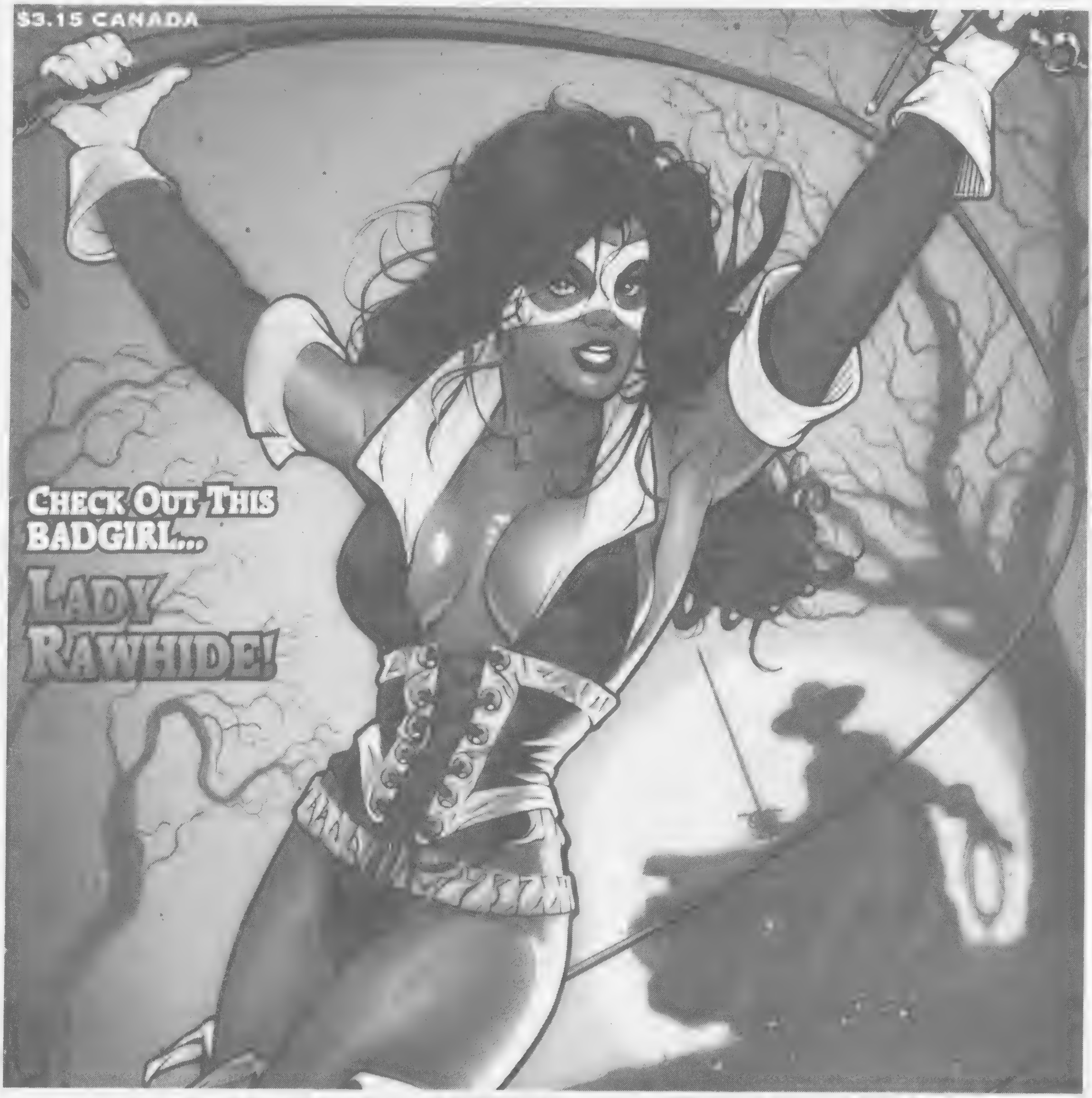
LOU: *And it's always summer where she's going. I guess they always have adventures really near the equator, I don't know.* (Laughter.)

DON: About the Lady Rawhide character, there's so many questions that have to be considered when you're doing a monthly book.

And by the way, the considerations in doing a monthly comic are quite different from doing a mini-series. You know, there are characters who you may not come


PARDON, SEÑORITA, BUT THIS IS A PROBLEM I HAVE NEVER HAD TO ...UHM... CONTEND WITH BEFORE.
PLEASE.
ACCEPT MY APOLOGIES.
I WOULD NEVER TOUCH YOU SO INDELICATELY--
--WITHOUT YOUR PERMISSION, THAT IS!

get out of this chain-metal bra and panties."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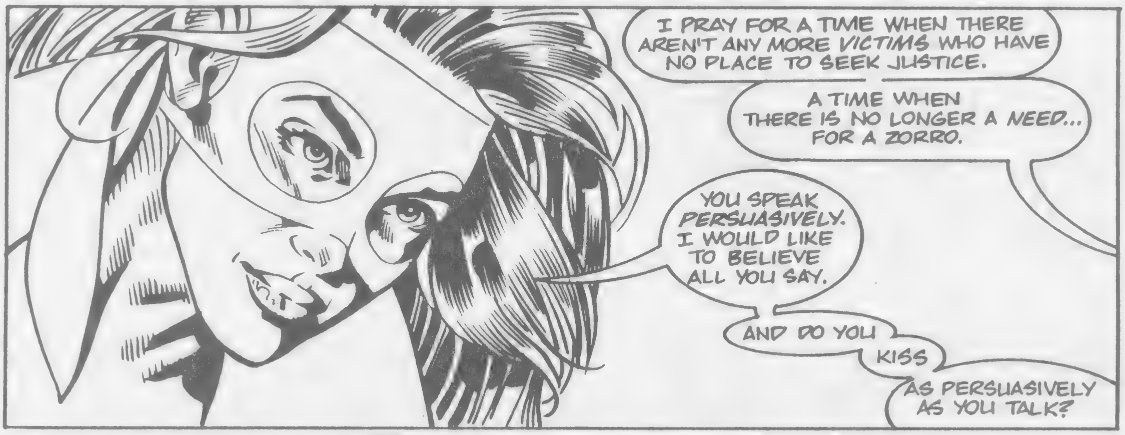
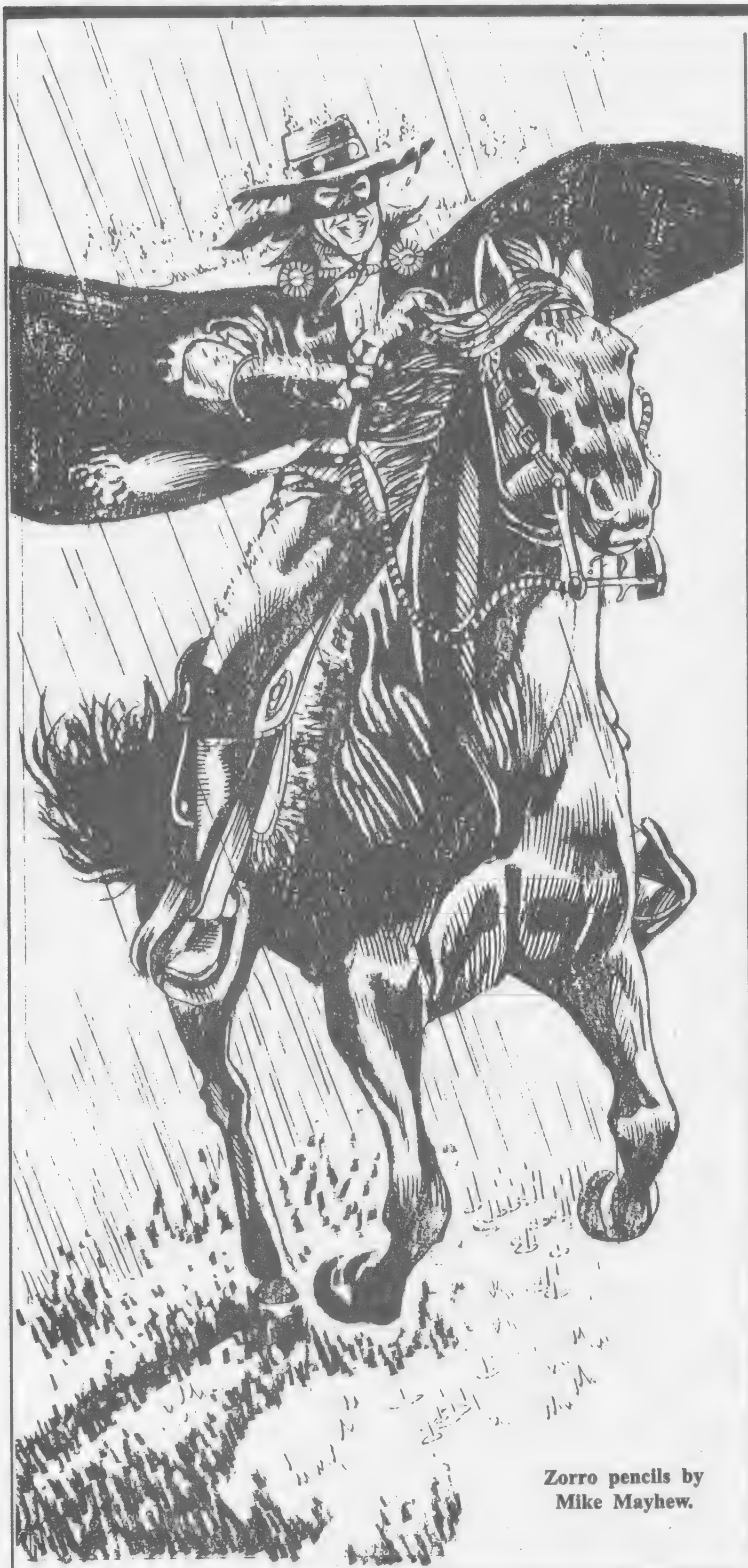
CHECK OUT THIS BADGIRL...
LADY RAWHIDE!

Above: Detail from Adam Hughes' ZORRO #3 cover art. (Hint: watch for a big AH! surprise in our 150th issue special!)


I PRAY FOR A TIME WHEN THERE AREN'T ANY MORE *VICTIMS* WHO HAVE NO PLACE TO SEEK JUSTICE.
A TIME WHEN THERE IS NO LONGER A *NEED*... FOR A ZORRO.
YOU SPEAK *PERSUASIVELY*. I WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE ALL YOU SAY.
AND DO YOU KISS AS PERSUASIVELY AS YOU TALK?

"The thing we've done different with Zorro



Zorro pencils by Mike Mayhew.

back to for a year, or for years. So there's a whole bunch of different considerations that have to go into there.

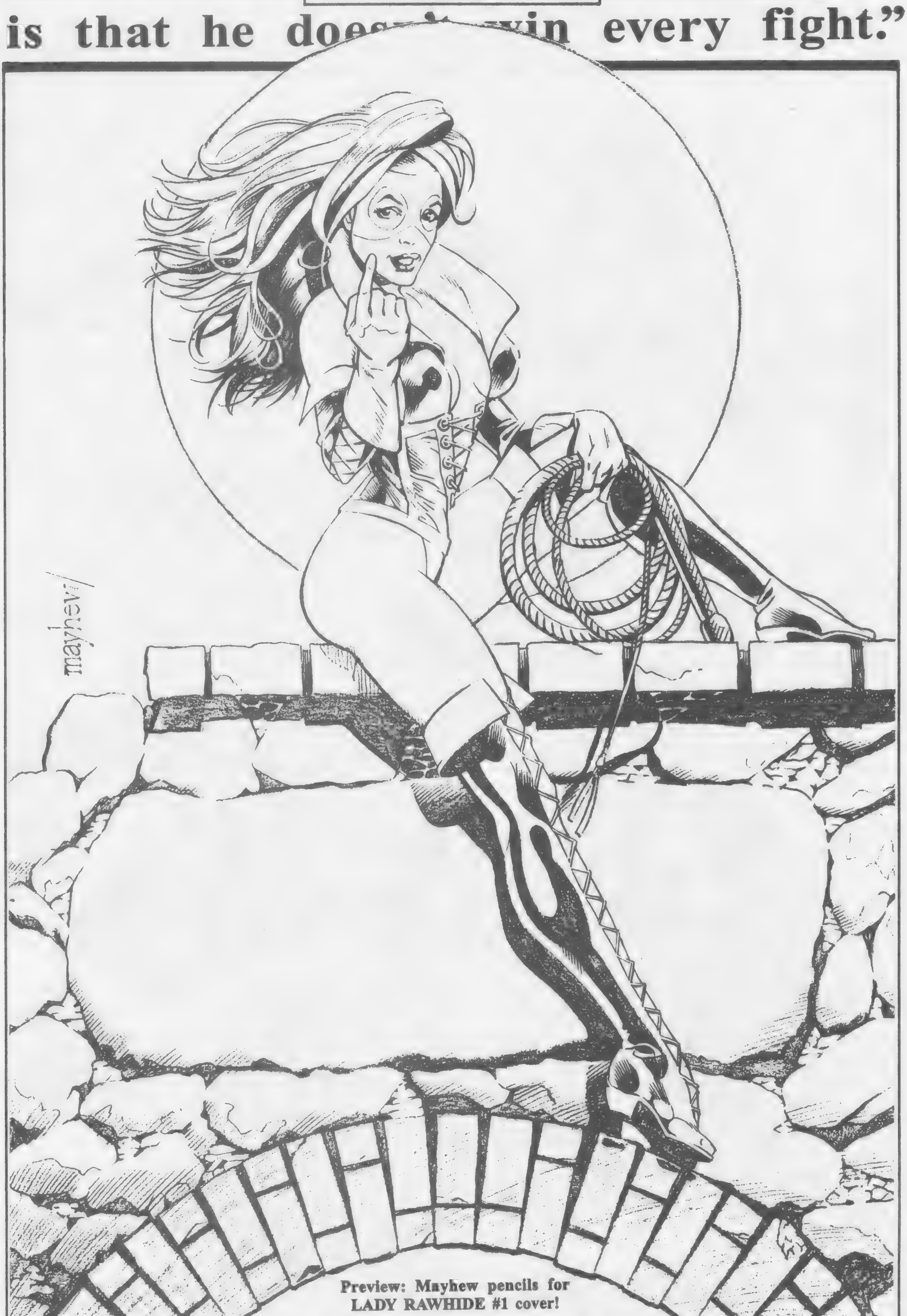
But in doing a monthly book, one of the first thoughts I had was that, well, Marvel had a ZORRO comic out there not that long ago. And one of the things I wanted to do was make sure there was a real provocative cast of supporting characters around Zorro. So there's a Machete, and there's a Moonstalker, and there's a Lady Rawhide. And they're very visually distinctive, just as Zorro is. 'Cause I thought if we just came out with a book where he's just going up against the soldiers, as interesting as characters like Captain Monasterio and Sergeant Garcia are, visually on the covers if they equate us with that kind of book, we're going to be in trouble with trying to set our *own* identity to the series. The distributors can look at it and see that this is a new direction for the character. Not that we've necessarily done anything new to Zorro himself — his character basically stays the same.

The only thing that I think we've really done different with Zorro is that he doesn't easily win every fight that he's in. He gets in situations that are very difficult to get out of. In ZORRO #6, when they chain him up inside the whale, he is chained inside that whale for the entire book. He does *everything* to try and get out of there. And he can't. And I think there was some reluctance for us to do that. I think **Dwight Zimmerman,** our esteemed editor, was a little concerned about that. But, to his credit, he let it go out there to the audience, and it got a very good response.

But part of it was saying to the audience, "This isn't where Zorro does two flicks with the sword, and he's out of whatever trouble he's in. He's gonna have to work at this to stay alive." And part of doing a monthly book is if you can just for a few seconds get the audience to forget that he's gonna come back in the next issue *(Laughter.)*, you've done your job as a storyteller. That's part of your job as a storyteller in this genre, is to get them so wrapped up in that moment that they're going, "Well, what can happen to him next? There's no way, now, he's dead, he's gone!" And then you have to convincingly find a way to get Zorro out of that situation. because the audience, when it sees that, buys it. And it stays on a very human level, albeit a very intense one.

Speaking of the next issue — that's where you'll find Part Two of this marathon Don McGregor interview. Be here!

is that he doesn't win every fight."



Preview: Mayhew pencils for LADY RAWHIDE #1 cover!

you like bad gyrls?
you'll love bad womyn!
CAPTAIN FORTUNE tm
sex violence hairballs and one cool cat
adults only
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"Sex, violence, hairballs. The world view of a cat."

RON FONTES

CAPTAIN FORTUNE is a Euro-styled, sexy, funny, sci-fi series similar in sensibility to HARDBOILED, BRAT PACK or SACHS & VIOLENS, but it could only have come from the twisted mind of Ron Fontes. A former Marvel staffer, Ron worked for Whitman, wrote scripts for DC, and was the original designer of COMICS INTERVIEW. Since 1986, he has written mass-market children's books for publishers like Disney, Random House and Golden Books. Suddenly he's on the comics scene with an adult alternative adventure series from that most independent of independents, ***RipOff Press****. John Upham interviewed Fontes from the cozy home Ron shares with three cats and children's book writer Justine Korman on the coast of Maine.*

JOHN UPHAM: *I've seen the ads: Sex, violence, hairballs. What is that supposed to mean?*

RON FONTES: In the simplest terms, the world view of a cat. That slogan covers some important instincts. Food and sleep are feline spiritual matters. I believe all the most interesting people are like cats. They're independent, curious and usually gratify their senses.

VITAL STATISTICS

name: Ronald H. Fontes
born: Los Angeles, CA 1952
profession: Maestro
education: BA, A.P.S.U.
residence: Maine
favorite artists: Bernini
Caravaggio
Adam Hughes
The King
fave colors: black, red, white
favorite media:
film: BLISS
METROPOLIS
TV: ALIEN NATION
X-FILES
book: LITTLE BIG MAN
comic: BATMAN ADVENTURES
BONDAGE FAIRIES
music: Mozart
J.M. Jarre
film goddesses: Louise Brooks
Joan Chen
Gong Li
Winona Ryder
biggest gripe: Intolerance, I won't stand for it!

“Kirby said, ‘You’ve been talking

JOHN: *Why is that important?*

RON: It’s just what I’ve seen of people in history. Everyone complains about a great man’s “flaws,” but they don’t seem to see that those appetites are part of the power of creation. **Hitler** was a pinch-turd vegetarian who was no damn fun. **Caravaggio** was a carousing homosexual who died in a bar fight. One leaves us a legacy of death and horror, and the other, beauty and truth.

JOHN: *Is that the guiding philosophy behind CAPTAIN FORTUNE?*

RON: FORTUNE has had an incredibly long development period. I haven’t just devoured comic books until I could regurgitate the same stuff. I’ve toyed with comics, but I’ve been busy having a life, too. It's all really come together in the last few years, although it is very far from what I thought I’d do when I was a kid in Tennessee.

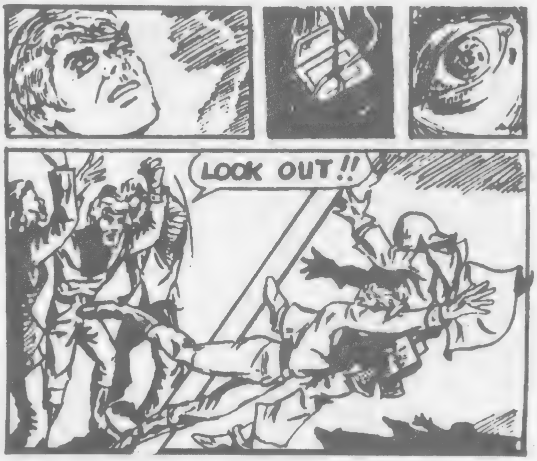
JOHN: *Born in L.A., grew up in Tennessee, and now living in Maine. How did that happen?*

RON: It was a long, strange trip. I was a sickly, skinny little nerd who always had his head in a book. I taught myself to draw. I bet you haven’t heard that before. (*Laughter.*) In 1968, I was 16 and my friend, **John Browne**, and I produced a comic strip for the local newspaper. It was a sci-fi spy epic, pretty ambitious. 2001 was the big deal back then, PLANET OF THE APES, that kind of stuff. We had a one-year contract. My rendering was pretty crude, but cranking out a daily strip taught me a lot.

JOHN: *So you were a local celebrity?*

RON: Hardly! I was surprised. I got a dirty phonecall, and the other kids made fun of me. Syndicates weren’t interested because the daily adventure strip was dying and I wasn’t professional enough. I showed samples to **Stan Lee** in 1972 or thereabouts. He was gonna be at a comic con in Nashville, so I wrote a letter in calligraphy. He got very excited and wanted to hire me as a letterer because he didn’t think my art was good enough. He also told me I should go to college, and then see if I still wanted to do comic books. My calligraphy was OK, but my lettering really sucks. At the Con, I wound up getting hotdogs for **Jack Kirby**. And he said, “I see you’ve been talking to Stan.” And I said, “Yes, sir.” And he says, “Don’t listen to him.”

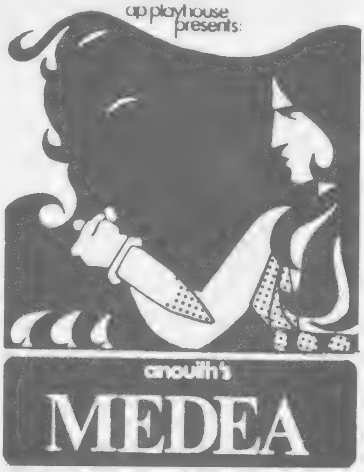
Innovative panel sequence from Ron's daily strip produced in 1968. Due to proportional problems, we can only reproduce the center sequence of a daily episode . This was flanked by two other panels.



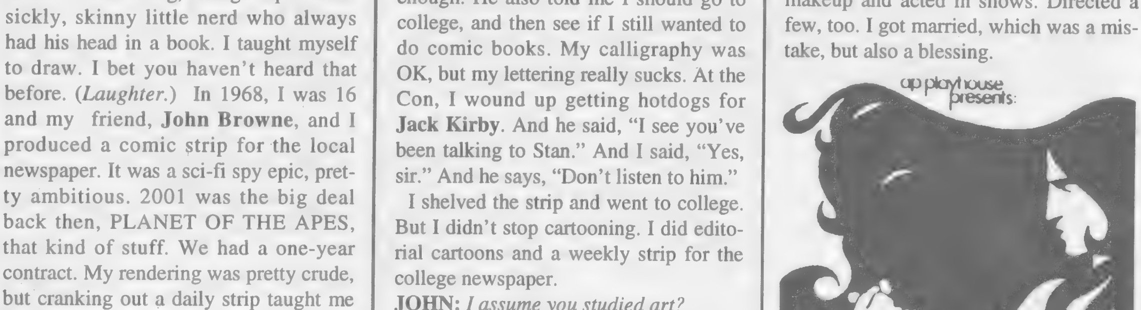
I shelved the strip and went to college. But I didn’t stop cartooning. I did editorial cartoons and a weekly strip for the college newspaper.

JOHN: *I assume you studied art?*

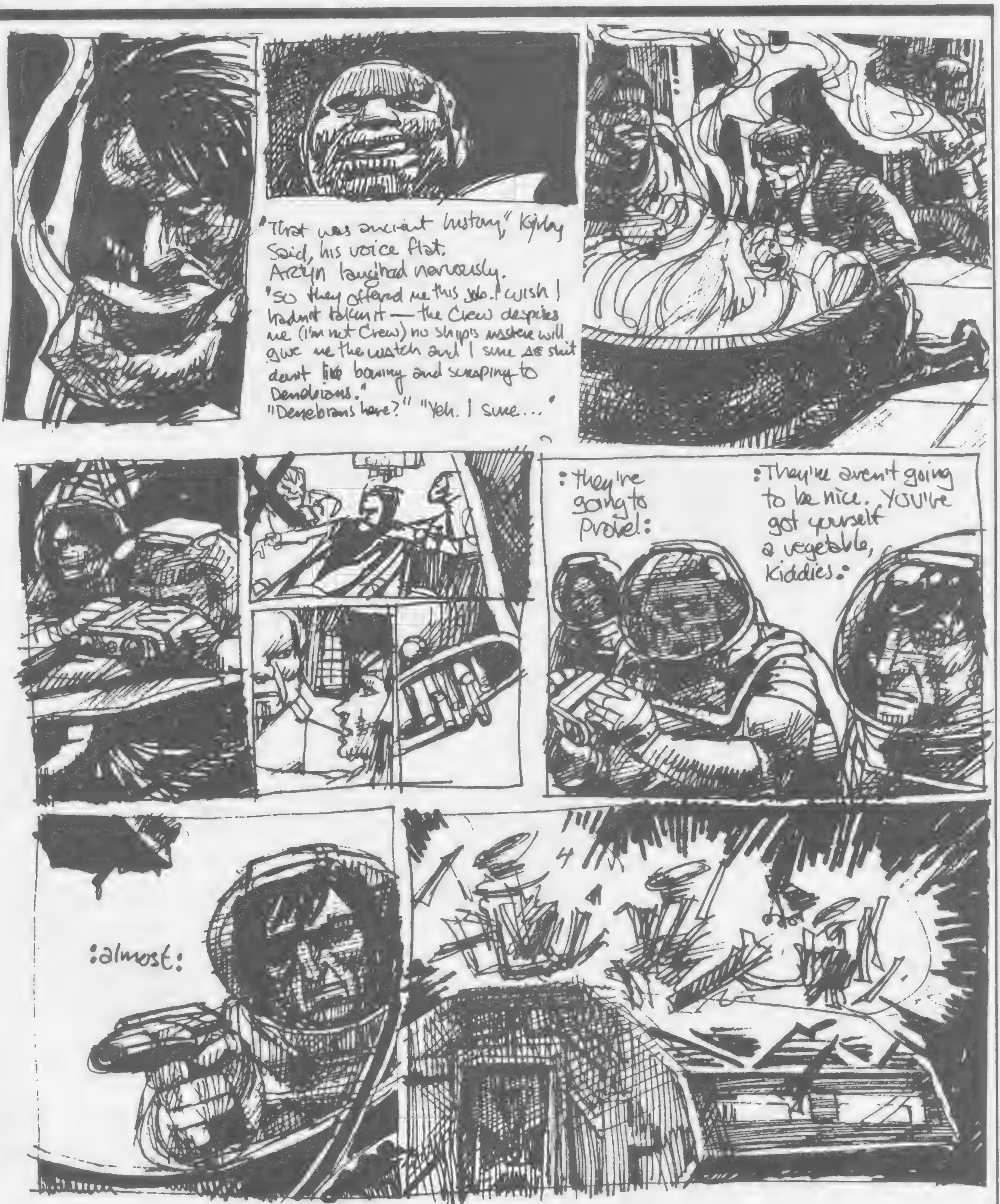
RON: Not for long! The professors were all out getting grants and making names for themselves, they wish, and the level of instruction was do-it-yourself. When they were around, they needled me for being “commercial.” Well, hell, I put myself through college by working for a printing company, I worked a stat camera, did typesetting, pasteups, all that crap. Anyway, I switched majors to the theatre department, and had a ball! I did posters and made costumes, painted scenery, learned makeup and acted in shows. Directed a few, too. I got married, which was a mistake, but also a blessing.


ap playhouse presents:
anouilh's
MEDEA

Below, a sample of SATYRE, Ron's college strip. At right, a theatrical poster.


THE FIRST FOOL I CAN THINK OF TO END THIS FOOL CRISIS IS THE MILLHOUS EMPEROR, DICK THE FIRST.
WE HAVEN'T SEEN HIM SINCE HE WON THE RACE FOR THE THRONE.
TREW-AYE WONDR WOT HEEZ DUN CENTS DEN.
AHA!
WHY WONDER? EVEN AS OUR FRIENDS HOP AND HOOF...
THIS PLACE HAS BEEN A MESS SINCE THE WATER-GATE ON THE DAM BROKE! WOULD SOMEONE PLEASE FIX THE DAM WATERGATE?

to Stan. Don't listen to him.'"

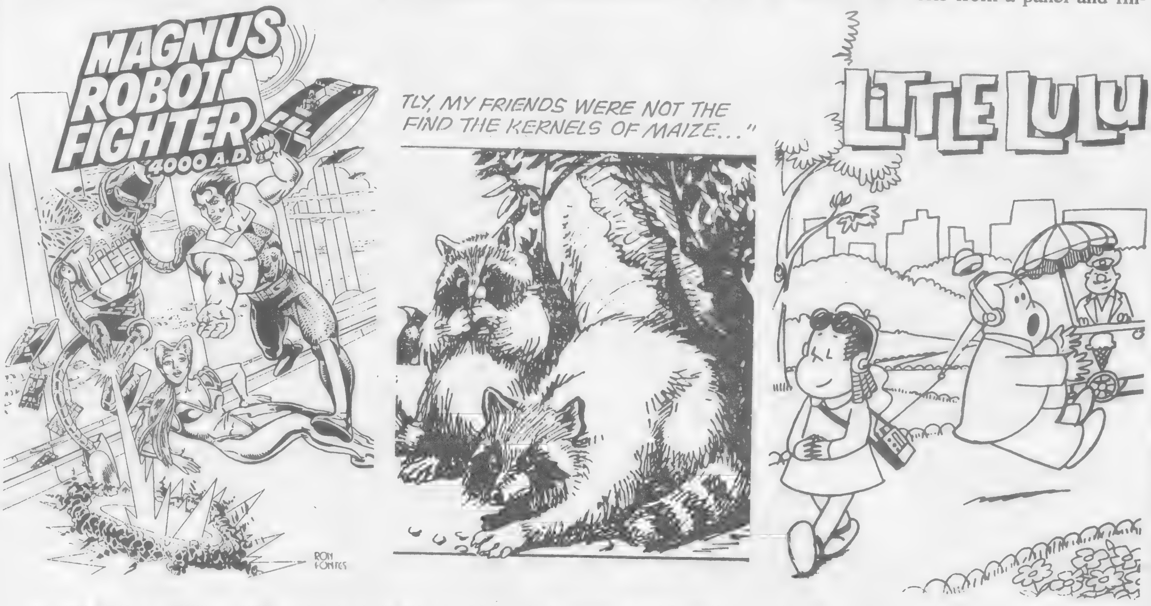

"That was ancient history," Kyrby Said, his voice flat.
Artyn laughed nervously.
"So they offered me this job. I wish I hadn't taken it — the Crew despises me (I'm not Crew) no ship's master will give me the watch and I sure as shit don't like bowing and scraping to Denebians."
"Denebians here?" "Yeh. I sure..."
:they're going to prove!:
:They're aren't going to be nice. You've got yourself a vegetable, kiddies.:
:almost:

A page from THE ZONE, the sketchbook comic Ron drew in daily installments on the bus. THE ZONE eventually evolved into CAPTAIN FORTUNE. Its eye-patched hero, Kapitan Stan Kyrby, is no longer a central character, but will make his appearance as CAPTAIN FORTUNE progresses.

Whitman: "This looks like that Marvel shit."

JOHN: *What do you mean?*

RON: She was a singer with a traveling country-western show. We went on the road and played in fleapits and campgrounds. I was the warmup act: Wojinski the Wonderful, the World's Greatest Polish Magician. We split the box office take. The morning after our biggest show, we woke up to find the other performers had, like, silently folded their tents and slipped away in the night with all the money. They also sawed through our drive shaft, so our van broke down deep in Georgia. We got towed to a garage, this really decent man bought us a big lunch and I had to draw caricatures of the whole town to pay for repairs.



At left, Ron's version of MAGNUS ROBOT FIGHTER. Center, a TUROK panel Ron finished for artist Jack Sparling. Right, a layout gag sketch for LITTLE LULU.

JOHN: *Did you stay in showbiz?*

RON: I did some acting for a while, but that's a very discouraging business. My face isn't distinctive enough. My voice tends to be shrill on tape. My wife wanted steady money and pushed me into a job at an ad agency. I wore three-piece suits and rode the bus. To amuse myself, I drew a comic book in one-page-per-trip installments; the prototype for CAPTAIN FORTUNE. At 26, I was a junior vp and art director at a fancy-schmancy Nashville ad agency, drawing a how-to-save-energy comic for the electric company. My wife was a secret cokehead and mattress for anyone even remotely connected with the music industry.

JOHN: *Sounds idyllic.*

RON: It gets better. I came home from work one fine June day and everything was gone with the wife. Every cent in the bank, the car, everything. You know that scene in TRUE LIES, where **Tom Arnold** was yelling "what kind of a woman takes the ice trays?" I know what kind. There I was, trapped in a country song: My woman and truck and dog wuz gawn. But this was the blessing. I had nothing to lose anymore.

JOHN: *So what'd you do?*

RON: I freaked out for a while, called **Candace Miller**, an actress I knew in New York, and drove up with my friend **Kang Yi** in his Porsche. Kang runs an art school in California now. I don't know where Miller is. I saw her on a SUPERBOY episode, but nothing since.

I slept on Miller's floor and temped for eight months, got a job at a hole-in-the-wall ad agency and then met **Mike Teitelbaum** at a party. He had me do some sample pages of MAGNUS for Whitman Comics. They didn't like the samples—**Wally Green** roared "This looks like that Marvel shit!"—but they hired me as a staff artist and cover designer.

Whitman is Western Publishing/Little Golden Books, which was owned by Mattel Toys then. We did LITTLE LULU, UNCLE SCROOGE, FLASH GORDON and all the stuff Valiant is based on.

I met **Johnny Costanza** there. Great guy. **Bill duBay** and **Robin Snyder** (even taller than **Shooter**) briefly passed through as editors. I met my mate, **Justine Korman** there, just because the mens' toilet was on the editorial side of the building. She thought I was gay because I was thin and my clothes matched and I thought *she* was because she had no fashion sense, darling.

JOHN: *Other than critiquing fashion, what exactly did you do there?*

RON: Besides designing LITTLE LULU covers? Whitman reprinted old TWILIGHT ZONE stories and BORIS KARLOFF PRESENTS under different titles, so part of my job was to, like, remove old Boris from a panel and finish the rest of the picture, matching the artist's style, which was easy for me. I also finished a lot of TUROK panels. The artist on TUROK, **Jack Sparling**, told me he used a kitchen timer to draw his pages. Western paid horrible rates, it was like $25 for an inked page. Jack would only work a page until the timer went off and then he'd just hand in the pages, because he said he wasn't making any money if he spent more time on them. So I inked a lot of backgrounds and drew whatever stuff he didn't want to bother with or didn't have scrap on hand. One of my assignments was to touch up the art for the Disney SNOW WHITE comic. I really laughed my butt off when I saw Marvel had reprinted that

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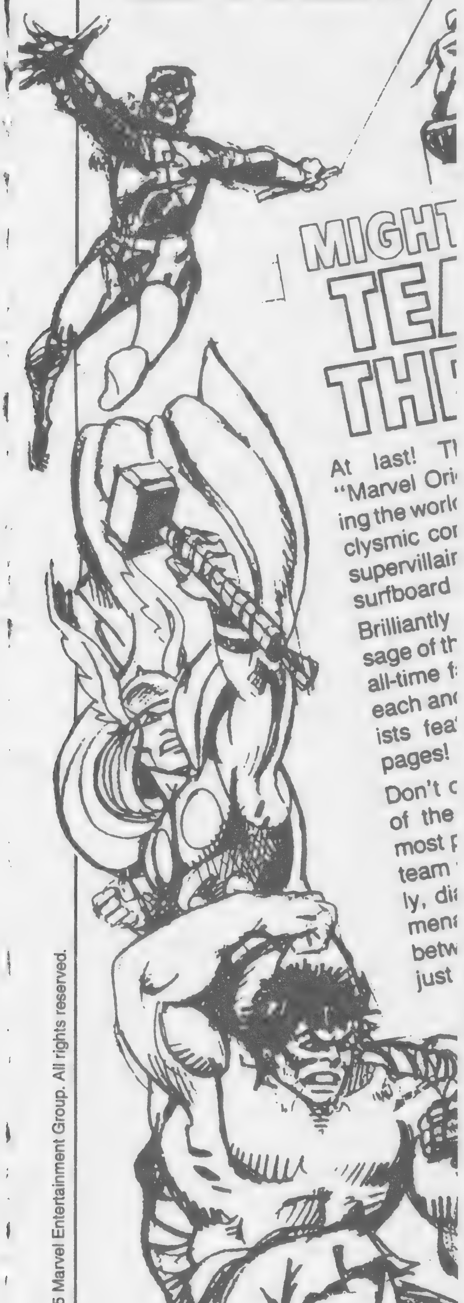
"Marvel hired me. I didn't want to draw Spider-Man."

Ron's layout for MIGHTY MARVEL TEAM-UP THRILLERS back cover. John Romita Sr. did the finished art.



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same comic book. I mean, I redrew the entire last page because the art had deteriorated.

JOHN: *Weren't you there when Whitman was dissolved?*

RON: The ax fell on Whitman Comics at ToyFair '82. **Wally Green** towed us over to the Mattel Building, with orders to look out for anything that might make a good comic book. We were in ecstasy when this "host" in a barbarian suit introduced us to prototypes of HE-MAN AND THE MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE! Then he displayed mockup comic books from DC! That cab trip back to the office was bleak. Wasn't long before Snyder and I, and a hundred people at the Poughkeepsie printing plant were let go. They gave us six weeks severance pay and we could use the office to job hunt. I got Mr. Green to write letters to the art directors at all the comics companies. I didn't want to go back to advertising.

JOHN: *And you got hired at Marvel?*

RON: **Sol Brodsky** called and asked me to come down to Marvel. I used all my acting to stay cool. Sol was a lovely man. He hired me 'cause I wasn't a specialist. In my advertising career, I have done just thousands of pieces, logo designs, ad layouts, finished art, display lettering (which doesn't suck), storyboards, you name it. I knew printing processes. Most importantly, I didn't want to draw Spider-Man (not then!) and I had a sense of humor. So I walked out of there with a job. Thing is, Sol had never seen the résumé I mailed to the Marvel Art Director. **John Romita Sr.**, bless his soul, never read his incoming mail. A year after I was working there, we were moving Romita's office and found my letter.

JOHN: *So why did Sol call you?*

RON: He was having lunch with **Victor Gorlick** of Archie Comics, and bitching that **Paty Cockrum** had quit Special Projects. Victor said, "Well, what about this guy?" and gave him my letter. **Romita** thought that was hilarious. "There's guys that would give their left nut to work here and you waltzed in the side door!"

JOHN: *How long were you at Marvel?*

RON: From August 2, 1982 to August 2, 1984. I like symmetry. I met a great bunch of people there. I truly respect **Romita Sr.** When we were moving his office, he offered me this drawing he'd done when he was 19. It was this beautiful pencil nude study. Looked like something out of the Renaissance. I couldn't take it. I thought I wasn't worthy. Boy, was I stupid!

JOHN: *Who else did you know at Marvel?*

RON: Oh, those nuts! I liked the people, even if I was too busy, and in a different department, to get to know them well. **Mike Carlin** (who was as skinny as **Pee-wee Herman**) and **Mark Gruenwald** and **Eliot Brown** covered their entire office, walls, ceiling and furniture, with posters of anchorwoman **Michelle Marsh**.

I did the Marvel baseball jacket for **Peter David** when he was an assistant marketing guy. He was fun and he worked his butt off! He used my drawings of the Hulk for some promotional materials. **Carol Kalish**, his boss, for some mysterious reason switched the designs for the jacket with the one meant for a t-shirt and vice versa. Would've looked a lot better if they'd just listened to me. Oh, well.

Kyle Baker was an intern, doing backgrounds for Spider-Man or something and he passed around this Xeroxed comic book he did, PLAYHOUSE PERPLEXITAS, funny animals, great stuff. I still have it around here somewhere. I showed it to a Doubleday editor we knew, **Karen Suben**, and that's how COWBOY WALLY came to be. Kyle, who is a great talent and a gracious gentleman, even at 19, dedicated one of the chapters to me 'cause we dragged him along on one of our screenplay meetings and the chapter's all about these Hollywood assholes turning Hamlet into a two-fisted guy. Dead on.

"I'm the guy who brought Ditko back to Marvel."

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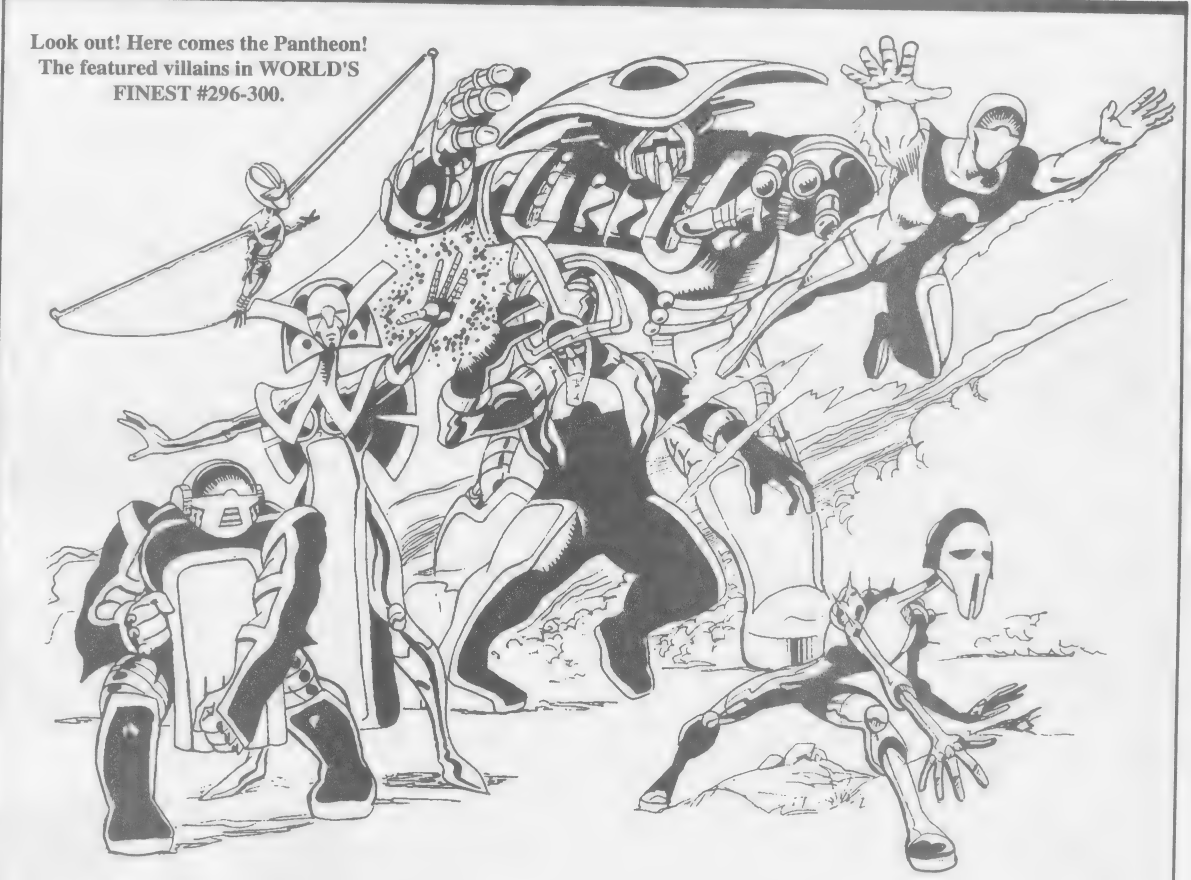

Look out! Here comes the Pantheon! The featured villains in WORLD'S FINEST #296-300.

I also worked with **David Anthony Kraft**. We were doing Marvel children's books and I plotted a multi-part WORLD'S FINEST story with him for DC Comics. Got to come up with a bunch of cool villains. However, when the books came out, no one at Marvel noticed. Well, actually, **Jim Owlsley** came by and told me **Shooter** didn't like that I went to the competition first. What the fuck? The big guy never spoke to me. Most Marvelites wouldn't give me the time of day for the first year I was there. I was Paty II, or the Troll. But when I got promoted to supervisor, suddenly they all wanted to be my buddy. You know, even after that small notice from **Shooter**, it's not like he came around and said, "Hey, Ron, want to do a story for us?" But don't get me started.

I'm the guy who brought **Steve Ditko** back to Marvel. I needed somebody to draw a TRANSFORMERS coloring book and **Marie Severin** gave me his phone number. I couldn't believe he'd do something that low, but he said, "Work is work." So **Shooter** sees him coming out of my office and latched onto him. Hell, I got **Johnny Costanza** to do HEATHCLIFF books for me.

JOHN: *I want to keep my job. What about DAK?*

RON: Dave took me out for a couple of beers and told me about this magazine he wanted to start, and talked me into designing and pasting up COMICS INTERVIEW. I had **Jim Salicrup** breathing down my neck and a woman named **Susan Kraetz** to help with the mechanicals. One night a burglar busted the lock on my apartment and **Salicrup** rushed all the way downtown with money for the locksmith. I don't know if I ever thanked him enough. Thanks again,Jim,wherever you are. (*Laughter.*)

Around that time, I did a logo design for Epic Comics and got to know **Laurie Sutton.** We did a story for EPIC ILLUSTRATED that is almost CAPTAIN FORTUNE. Didn't have the name, because Laurie didn't like it. I had shown her all the stuff I'd done for the prototype and she suggested turning my space captain into a woman. Very '80s. We were having lunch in this restaurant and I was thinking we needed something better than that. She suggested maybe an alien. And I looked over at the restaurant's cat, this big gray magpie, and said, "How 'bout a cat?"

She goes "Great!" And we did it. It was an inventory story, only got published because some big name missed a deadline. It started off as 12 pages and got hacked down to 8. It was just a mess. They even left off a whole page of dialog balloons.

Everybody at Marvel thought we were having an affair or something because we spent so much time together. But Laurie had lived in Japan and was into *manga* and stuff, and she knew art and fashion and had more to talk about than most of the guys. I'd rather talk to women, anyway. Laurie wanted to move on to other stuff, including a fashion comic, and we argued about goals. So I didn't hear from her for two years.

JOHN: *Why did you leave Marvel?*

RON: I wore myself out. I had to quit COMICS INTERVIEW after issue three because my health gave out. Sorry, Dave. I mean, I was doing the magazine on weekends and nights. I did every-

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NEAL ADAMS P CRAIG RUSSELL
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"I hung out with a bunch of lesbians. Great."

thing, down to the color seps for the covers. The job at Marvel got very demanding, and I just pooped out. I passed out on the subway on the way to work. Scared the hell out of me. When I read about **Carol Kalish** dying on the way to work at Marvel, I knew how she felt.

Four months before I quit, Sol said he'd be in the hospital for about ten days for tests. And he just went home and died. Liver cancer. A bunch of his buddies died at around the same time. They'd all been on an observation ship at the Bikini Atoll atomic tests. And, concurrently, **Stan Goldberg**'s daughter was kidnapped and killed. Stan was working for me. I didn't know what to say to the guy. It was grim.

Anyway, I wound up with tons of responsibility and no preparation. I didn't even know how the Marvel billing system worked. Marvel is a nest of political intrigue. With Sol out of the way, there was a department up for grabs. My coworkers and I were told to spy on each other. I got as paranoid as **Kevin McCarthy** in INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. They booted people. I guess they were saving me for last, because I kept meeting their deadlines, even as they made them more and more impossible. Here's an Uncle Ron tip: Don't get promoted within a company, move up by moving on. Otherwise, people resent you.

The working conditions were horrible. Too much coffee. Too much bullshit. My office was literally a broom closet, and I had to share it with my assistant, and upper management...well, **Todd McFarlane** and those guys have told you all about that.

Besides, I couldn't see myself working there for 20 years and maybe getting thrown a licensed bone and never getting to do my own stuff. **Mike Hobson** tried to talk me out of resigning. I said I wasn't creatively fulfilled.

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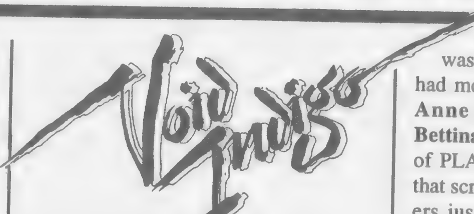

Logo for Steve Gerber's
VOID INDIGO
a short-lived series for Epic Comics.

He said something like: I'm not cursed with talent, but I know how to make money.

I hope that is a solace to him.

So I quit! Took six months off, bought a VCR and just watched movies, fiddled with FORTUNE, and finished my screenplay, before I even looked for another job and then it was part-time pasteup, boring, undemanding, at the NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL. I had some freelance clients. I did packaging illustrations and art for collector cases for Tara Toys, including a G.I.JOE combat case. The best one was for girls' fantasy dolls. Nights, I went to NYU film school. Met and studied acting with **Anne Carlisle**, and most of the cast of LIQUID SKY. Hung out with a bunch of lesbians, which was great, and I guess might explain some of the more fun-to-draw relationships in FORTUNE.

I understood then that I preferred the company of women. They like me. I like them. Of course, I'm a horny, sweaty guy, but I'm also shy and had a Southern upbringing, so I can keep my drool to myself—which is a great way to stay friends with beautiful women and get them to do nude modeling for you. Another Uncle Ron tip for all you horny young artists.

JOHN: *I'm sure you're very horny. Can we get back to the interview?*

RON: Oh yeah. By this time, Justine was writing children's books and we had moved uptown across the hall from **Anne Carlisle** and her roommate, **Bettina Koster** (check your back issues of PLAYBOY). Anne and I almost sold that screenplay, but the would-be producers just tried to cheat us, which is the Hollywood way of doing things. I was depressed and Justine was swamped with four ROGER RABBIT books. She asked me to give her a hand. So I finished the junior novelization for her.

JOHN: *What happened to CAPTAIN FORTUNE?*

RON: **Laurie Sutton** contacted me, after two years, and climbed back on the FORTUNE project. I thought it would be easier if she wrote it and I drew it. But she had other projects, and I wound up doing most of the work on FORTUNE anyway. I didn't like what she was doing. She was too whimsical and she ignored the cat. The characters sat around in bars and talked too much. We just had artistic differences.

JOHN: *Why did you leave New York?*

RON: Have you ever smelled it in the summer? But seriously, we were scared out of the building complex by the drug dealer who ran the place. We wouldn't buy his coke. Bettina moved out first, got us to meet her downtown and talked us into leaving New York. She went to Louisiana. We moved to Maine. It's quiet. We do not hear the screams of the dying. Now I'm co-writing kiddie books in the woods. Finally got my name in some of them, including the Disney Press ROCKETEER junior novel, a few historical novels for their American Frontier series, a bunch of movie tie-ins for Troll, BIKER MICE FROM MARS and X-MEN books at Random House. It's a living and it beats office work.

JOHN: *How do you do children's books out of the Maine woods?*

RON: While we were in New York listening to gunfire, Justine had a brilliant idea—CRITTER NEWS, a monthly

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croon if you love june

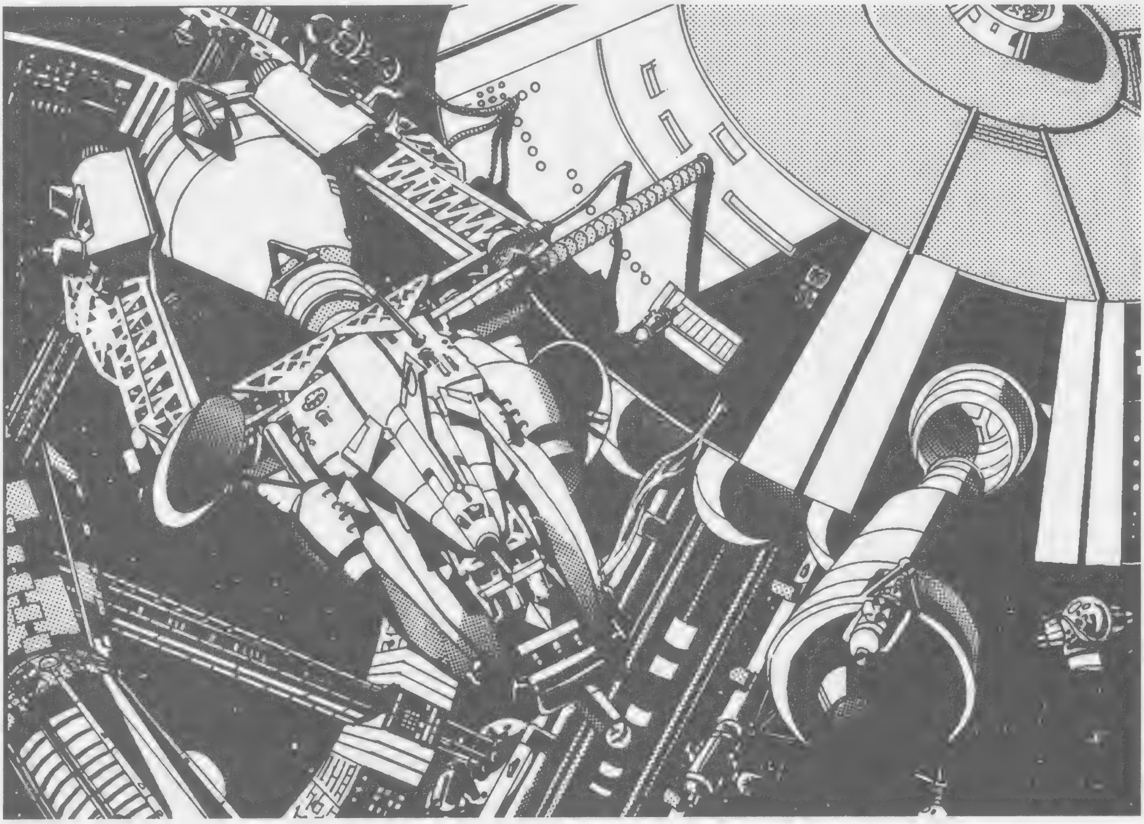
june 1992

career corner

nature notes

Children's book

"I had to forget 20 years of tricks and learn to draw."



Docked at Albireo Station, the *Kurosawa* is hooked to a cargo podule.

newsletter with a recipe and a kid's story and a nature column and it keeps us in touch with the publishers. I designed it and I do all the pictures. Teeny has to think up all the words. *(Laughter.)*

JOHN: *And you have the time to do CAPTAIN FORTUNE, too?*

RON: There's nothing else to do. We're an hour from the nearest movieplex, if the roads are clear. We just got cable last year. I fool around painting scenery for the local theater and I've done a couple of sets for TV shows for **Tim Sample**, the "Postcards from Maine" guy on CBS SUNDAY MORNING.

But still, the winters are long and dark. The first year we moved up here, 1988, I got back on CAPTAIN FORTUNE. Rewrote it. Came up with new characters. Re-drew pages, sometimes as many as six times. It wasn't easy. I'm not the world's greatest artist. I had to forget twenty years of commercial art tricks and learn to draw again.

JOHN: *You do have a very distinctive technique.*

RON: I developed this approach to get maximum depth, a sense of space in the pictures. I use technical pens to draw the backgrounds and props, and a brush for the characters and organic subjects. Got the idea while watching *anime*. I want the look of an animated film: soft backgrounds, hard-edged people.

JOHN: *Did you teach yourself lettering?*

RON: Oh, Bob, no! I noticed that this woman who worked at a local art store did some really fine hand-lettering. So I paid her $10 a page. Her name is **Wendy Mansfield** and she was an architecture student. She's a lot of fun and now she also works for a company that designs custom kitchens. They've been featured on THIS OLD HOUSE several times.

JOHN: *Any comics influences?*

RON: You mean, who do I like? Well, I gotta say **Adam Hughes**. Beautiful rendering, totally expressive. **Dave Stevens**, duh, **Jaime Hernandez**, because he's like this *maestro*. I like **Steve Rude**, but he tends to be so slick that he actually loses feeling. Well, let's just run down a list: **Alex Toth, Milo Manara, Vittorio Giardino, Moebius**, the artist **Magnus**, not the robot smasher, **Russ Manning, Bilal, Alex Raymond, David Mazzuchelli**. Are you detecting a trend here? But I want you to know, even though I can make perfect copies of people's stuff, I don't swipe.

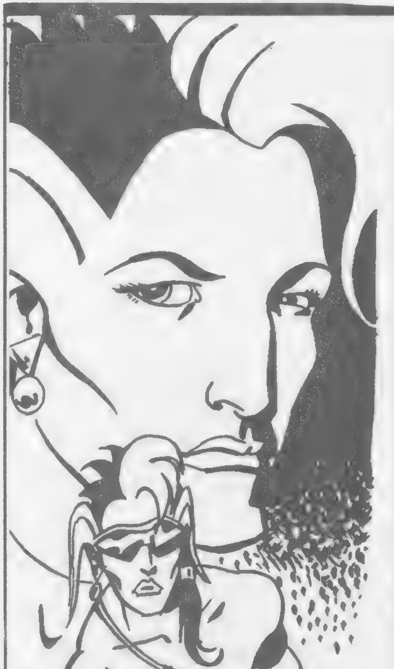
JOHN: *You named a bunch of classic American artists and several Europeans. What do you think of Japanese comics?*

RON: I really enjoy *manga* because most of them are much more grown-up than American comic books. I mean for God's sake, their heroes have to go to the toilet. And no subject is forbidden. I am exasperated that the market is swamped with carbon-copy superhero teams, when there are so many other stories in the world. The so-called "Alternative" comics are the best hope for the medium.

JOHN: *What led to the publication of CAPTAIN FORTUNE?*

RON: I saw that **RipOff Press** had published International Comics Star **Kevin J. Taylor**'s MODEL BY DAY and I thought, what the hell? Kevin and **Lance**

“Sexuality is either completely exploited or



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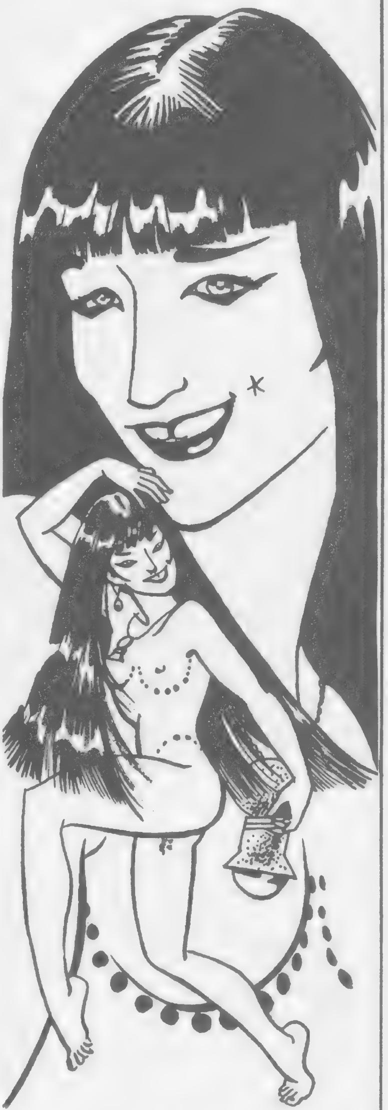


jynx

Tooks used to hang out for days at my place. I'm the one who helped Kevin work up the nerve and presentation to sell his first drawings to SCREW, and gave him the addresses of the underground publishers. And I thought, if he can do it, I can do it. So I just called RipOff Press, talked to **Kathe “Mom” Todd**. She said, “Send four pages of samples.” Well, I had that. And she said, “I like it. Let's go!”

Kathe and **Fred Todd** are out there on the frontier. They look for new artists, and they'll back you, if they think your stuff's good. They're certainly not making megabucks, and they're not looking to rule the comic book universe, but they have put out some of the best, creator-owned projects for the last 25 years. I mean, who the hell else would have published THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE? And they like CAPTAIN FORTUNE, which is not exactly conventional.

JOHN: *Can you be more specific?*

RON: Well, I want to get away from STAR TREK, you know where everyone's in the military and squeaky clean, complete with mildly tragic pasts. ‘Course I've got a few tragic pasts, too, but the stains show on the outside.

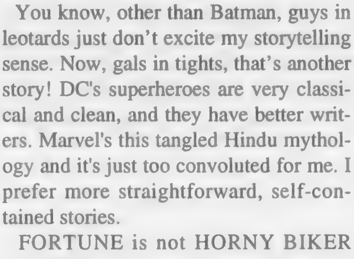
JOHN: *Why adults only?*

RON: I'm an adult. I do children's stuff all the time. In FORTUNE, I can do things we can't do for Disney or Golden Books, and I got a little wild with it in the first issue. I mean in the Disney Westerns, they don't like us killing anything. We neutered **Calamity Jane**, one of history's great sluts!

You know, other than Batman, guys in leotards just don't excite my storytelling sense. Now, gals in tights, that's another story! DC's superheroes are very classical and clean, and they have better writers. Marvel's this tangled Hindu mythology and it's just too convoluted for me. I prefer more straightforward, self-contained stories.

FORTUNE is not HORNY BIKER SLUTS (which I heartily enjoy), and it's not the sniggering camp in PENTHOUSE COMIX. I have a frank view of the totality of adult life which, if you're lucky, includes some hot sex.

A while back I noticed that sexuality is either completely exploited or completely ignored in science fiction. The big exception is **Robert A. Heinlein**, the only science fiction writer, besides **H.G.Wells**, I still enjoy reading. His is an adult voice.



captain fortune

Generally, science fiction posits exotic alien cultures with square, Mid-Western American sexual values. I'm trying to depict a future in which sexual mores are completely different from our own. Violence is the pornography of this time. The curses are not sexual words, but violent words, like “slap” or “hit.” And we don't have to worry about AIDs or anything, because, one, this is the distant future and, two, they're only drawings. Given the current climate in America,

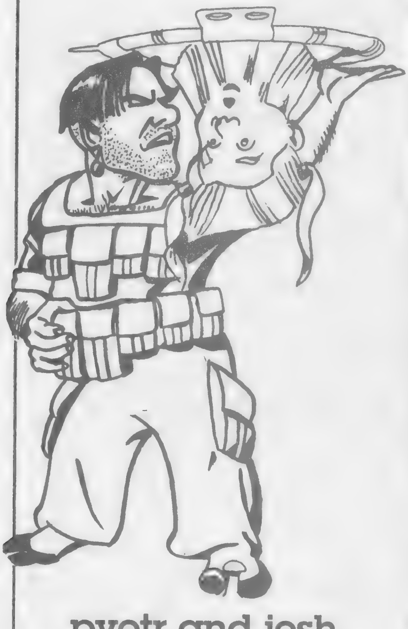
completely ignored in science fiction.”

fantasy is gonna be the major sexual outlet for most people.

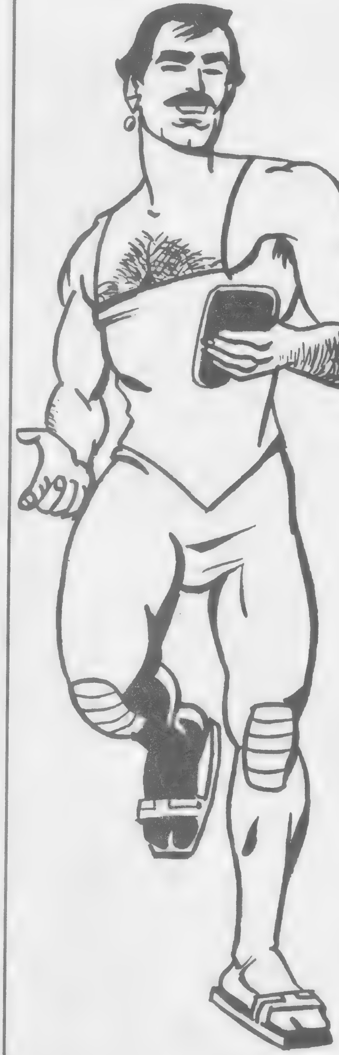
JOHN: *What types of stories will you be telling?*

RON: They're as varied as the passengers and cargo the *Kurosawa* is hired to haul. Fortune's starship, the *Kurosawa,* is like a tramp steamer in the Pacific during the 1930s. In the first issue, they're scooping hydrogen from a gas giant's atmosphere—and wind up in the middle of Noxxon Corporation's grab for a monopoly. Later, a research scientist takes them to a planet where one species regularly, ritually massacres another. Other adventures are prompted by the need for supplies or repairs. Major characters are going to die and stay dead. Things don't always run smoothly for the *Kurosawa* or its captain. I mean, that's life, right? You're bound to fall sometimes, but if you're smart, you land on your feet.

FORTUNE is not a slam-bang, STAR WARS shoot-'em-up, although I'll do that on occasion. It's not guys in Cadillac starships using godlike technobabble to save entire solar systems. Urth is dead and humankind is scattered across the Orion Arm. There won't be many funny foreheads running around. Space is vast. There are lots of species, but very little contact even between the human colonies.



pyotr and josh



jak

Interstellar travel is a dangerous and lengthy undertaking. Relativity ensures that most trips are one-way and you certainly can't make space-o-phone calls to remind your honey to feed the dog. Only frybrains are nuts enough to leave the comfy colonies to crew a starship. Everyone knows spacemun are lonely misfits.

And this is not all serious stuff. I mean, the major religion in the human colonies is centered on Evlys, the once-and-future King. Another group follows Lynon, as in Saints George, Paul and Starr. I have a really strong interest in anthropology, so given my basic premise for the colonization, I've tried to develop logical extrapolations for various cultures developing over thousands of years. I'm not specific about the year, because no one knows exactly when Urth died.

As for characters, what can I say? The **Captain** is a cat.

Jo is the muscle and the ship's pilot, the First Mate with a shady past whose deadly abilities are not quite human.

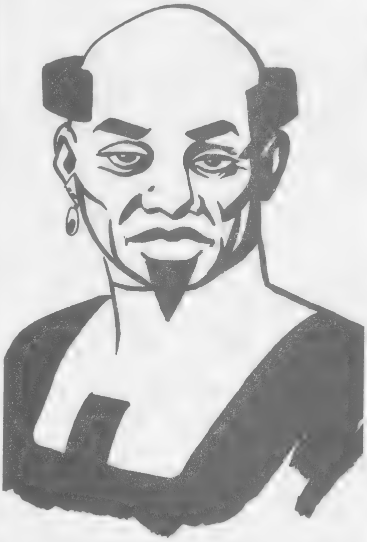
Jynx is her close personal friend (*laugh*), a tattooed sex slave from a long-lost colony, a sort of sacred temple prostitute. Jynx has devoted her life to sex—and Jo.

Jak is a manly man who gave up his hereditary rank in the NavFors to go on a personal quest.

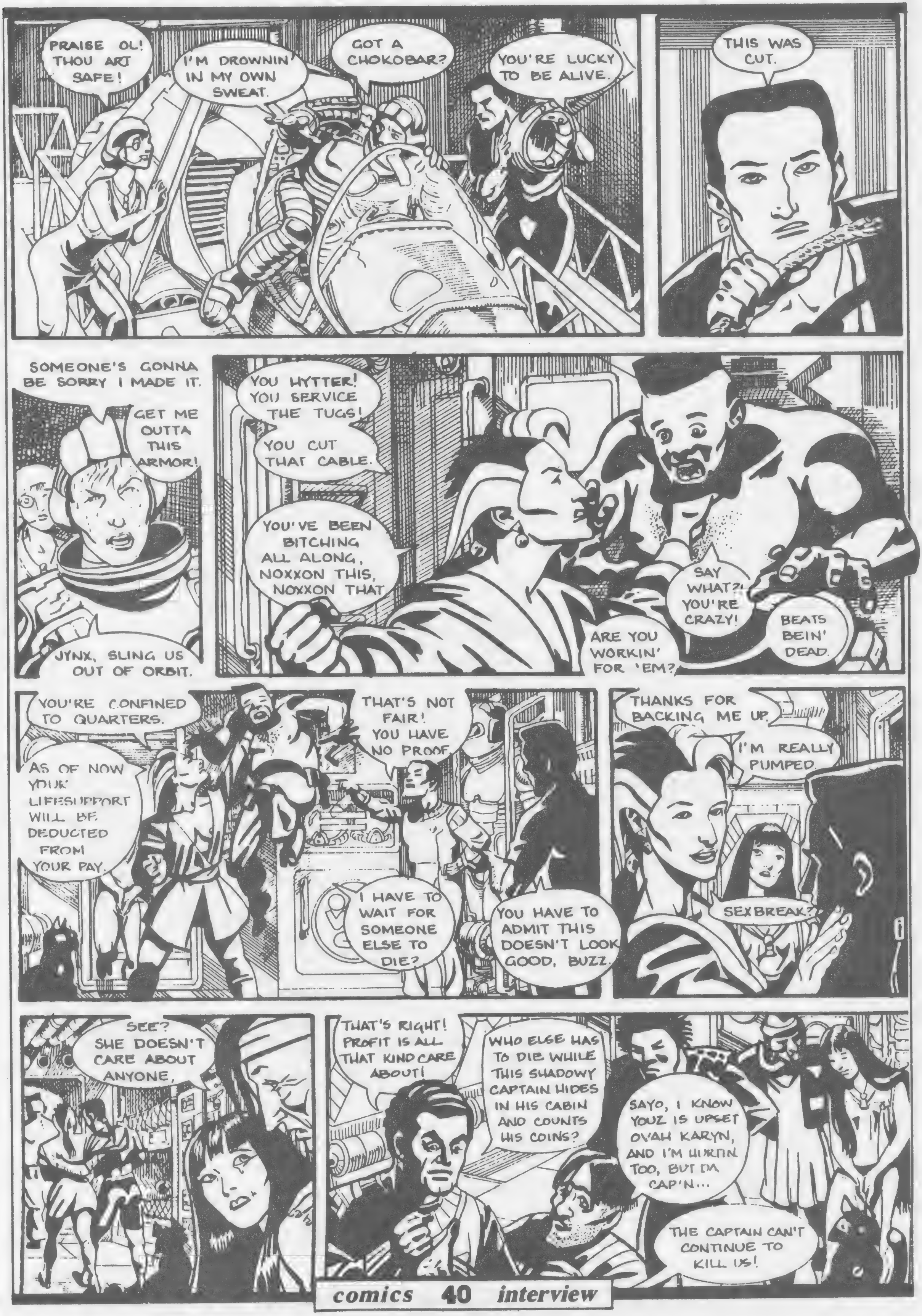
And then there's the master tek, **Pyotr**. He's a dwarf from Epindi, perfectly proportioned to the confined spaces in which he must work. His assistant is **Josh**, who's kind of a spoiled baby.

The ship's doctor is **Myles Frost**, who's as cold as his name. I could tell you great stuff about Frost, and I will—keep reading the book!

dr. myles frost

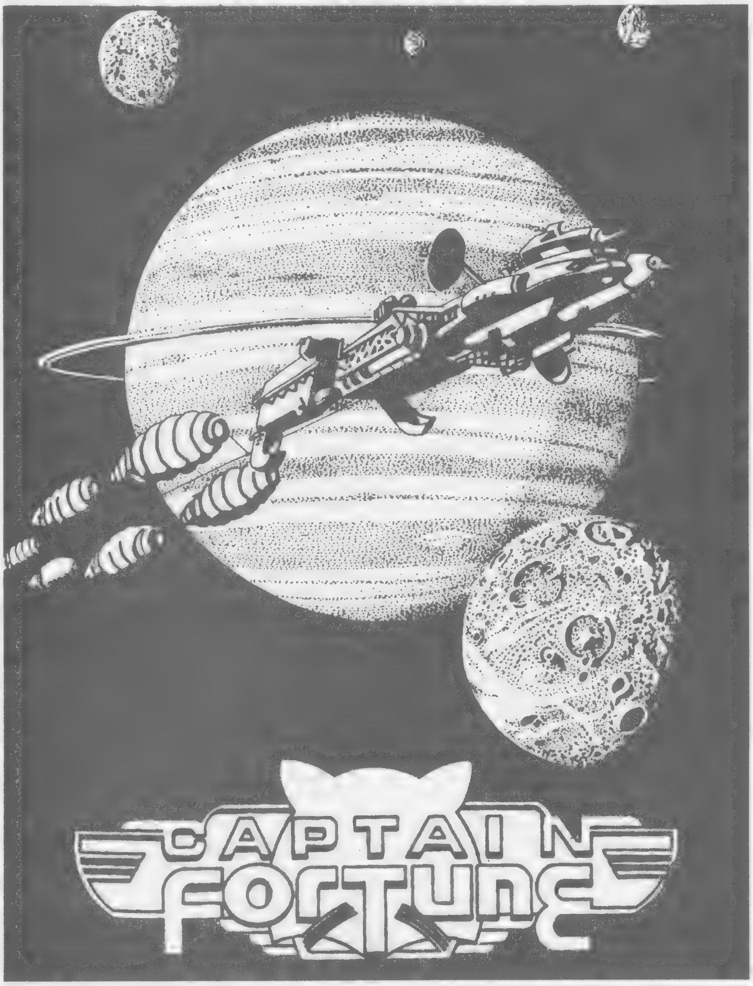


CAPTAIN FORTUNE: "The story is an epic


PRAISE OL! THOU ART SAFE!
I'M DROWNIN IN MY OWN SWEAT.
GOT A CHOKOBAR?
YOU'RE LUCKY TO BE ALIVE.
THIS WAS CUT.
SOMEONE'S GONNA BE SORRY I MADE IT.
GET ME OUTTA THIS ARMOR!
JYNX, SLING US OUT OF ORBIT.
YOU HYTTER! YOU SERVICE THE TUGS!
YOU CUT THAT CABLE.
YOU'VE BEEN BITCHING ALL ALONG, NOXXON THIS, NOXXON THAT.
SAY WHAT?! YOU'RE CRAZY!
ARE YOU WORKIN' FOR 'EM?
BEATS BEIN' DEAD.
YOU'RE CONFINED TO QUARTERS.
AS OF NOW YOUR LIFESUPPORT WILL BE DEDUCTED FROM YOUR PAY.
THAT'S NOT FAIR! YOU HAVE NO PROOF.
I HAVE TO WAIT FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO DIE?
YOU HAVE TO ADMIT THIS DOESN'T LOOK GOOD, BUZZ.
THANKS FOR BACKING ME UP.
I'M REALLY PUMPED.
SEXBREAK?
SEE? SHE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT ANYONE,
THAT'S RIGHT! PROFIT IS ALL THAT KIND CARE ABOUT!
WHO ELSE HAS TO DIE WHILE THIS SHADOWY CAPTAIN HIDES IN HIS CABIN AND COUNTS HIS COINS?
SAYO, I KNOW YOUZ IS UPSET OVAH KARYN, AND I'M HURTIN TOO, BUT DA CAP'N...
THE CAPTAIN CAN'T CONTINUE TO KILL US!

in 21 installments. Hope it's popular."

The *Kurosawa* tows hydrogen containers out into deep space.



Urth is dead. That is what our elders told us and their elders told them. The Mother World choked in the poisons of civilization and when all seemed lost, **Chayrmun Bob** of **Noxxon** stepped forth with a vision to save us all! Thus He founded the Franchises of the Associated Worlds. May Bob be forever blessed.

The cosmos is endless and the distances between stars so vast that each Franchise was alone. Only a few restless starships sailed the void, trading and smuggling and exploring. For once one entered relativity's distorted time, there could be no return. A trip between Franchises could be six months aboard a ship and sixty years on the point of origin.

Deep space was not a place to find the well-adjusted. The misfits who chose to eke out a precarious life on a starship were fugitives from fate, or unable to endure the confining colonies or suffered incurable wanderlust—a perfect description of Captain Fortune and his loyal First Mate!

The story is an epic in 21 installments. We start off in the scummiest pit in the human system and wind up someplace marvelous! With a lot of stuff inbetween. Oh yeah. Weird critters and genuinely bizarre aliens. And meanwhile, the human colonies are being invaded by the dreaded Denebian Unity, hermaphrodites from hell!

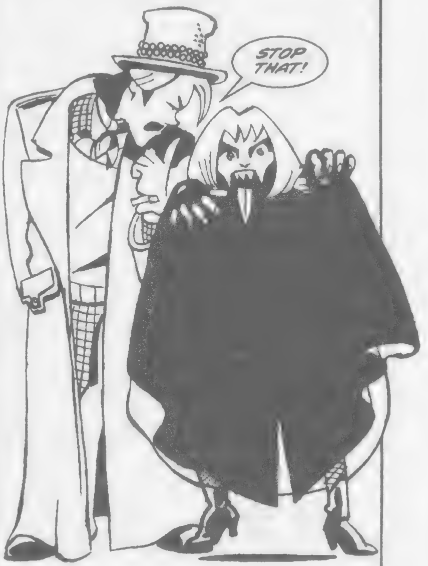
Bwa-ha-ha-ha-ha!

Best of all, the first three issues are already drawn. And I have scripts written up through issue twelve. Won't be missing any schedules.

JOHN: *Any future plans?*

RON: Well, obviously CAPTAIN FORTUNE. I hope it's popular enough that I can continue drawing it until I finish the story. I'll draw it anyway. But I don't have this vision of CAPTAIN FORTUNELAND or Happy Meal boxes. American society would have to radically change before they sold plastic toys of my characters. 'Course I would love to have a Jynx Action Figure with Dynamic Pump Action Hips™. I make a very comfortable living working with Justine. Money is the last thing on my mind. Instead of hoping to cash in bigtime, I'm drawing this for the sheer pleasure of doing it, and I hope to transmit that feeling to the reader.

But I also have something else that just popped into my head a couple of weeks ago. I've salvaged the screenplay I wrote and I want to do it as a comic book series. The title is TALES OF THE TERMINAL DINER and it's about, well, a boy and his vampire.



The CAPTAIN FORTUNE logo, CAPTAIN FORTUNE, JO, JYNX, JAK, PYOTR, JOSH, DR. MYLES FROST, TALES OF THE TERMINAL DINER, MARTY and BATTY, the distinctive likenesses thereof and all related indicia are ™ and © 1995 Ronald H. Fontes. All rights reserved.

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Good thing she's spilling over with both.

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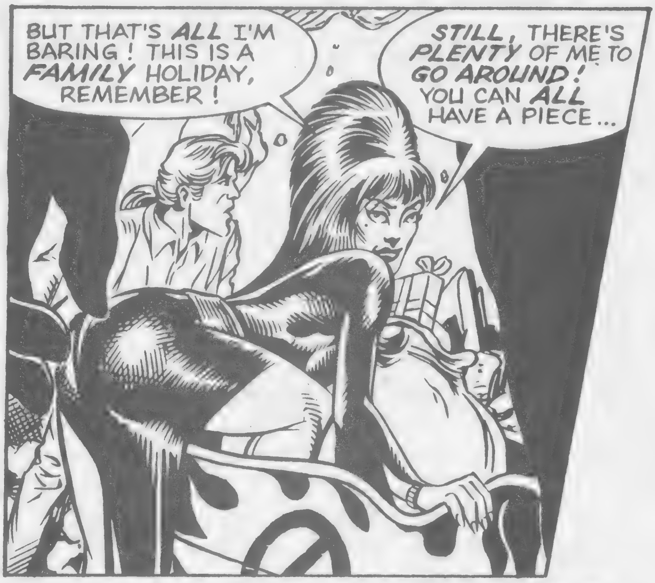
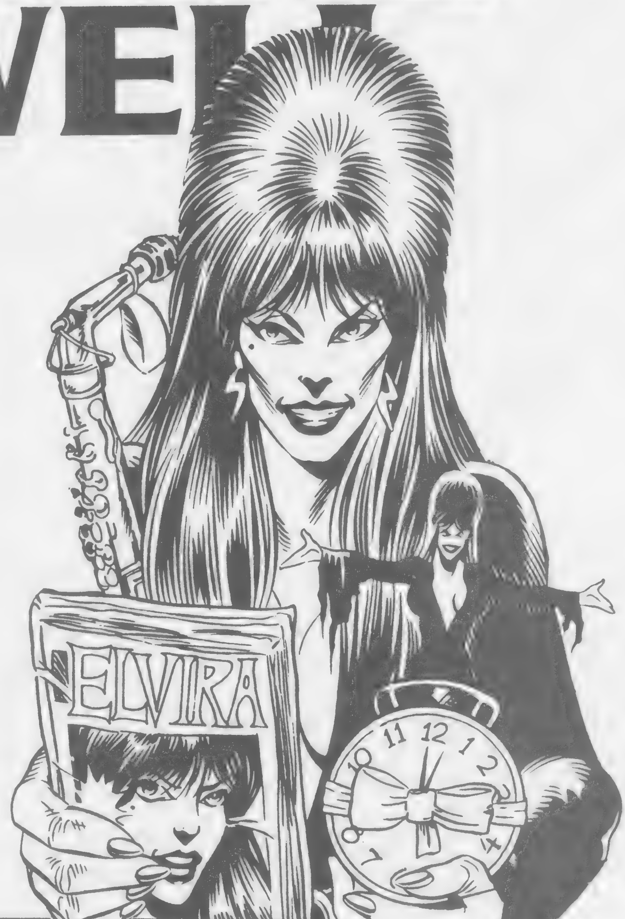
"I asked a friend in Hollywood to find Elvira's agent."


BUT THAT'S *ALL* I'M BARING! THIS IS A *FAMILY* HOLIDAY, REMEMBER!
STILL, THERE'S *PLENTY* OF ME TO *GO AROUND!* YOU CAN *ALL* HAVE A PIECE...

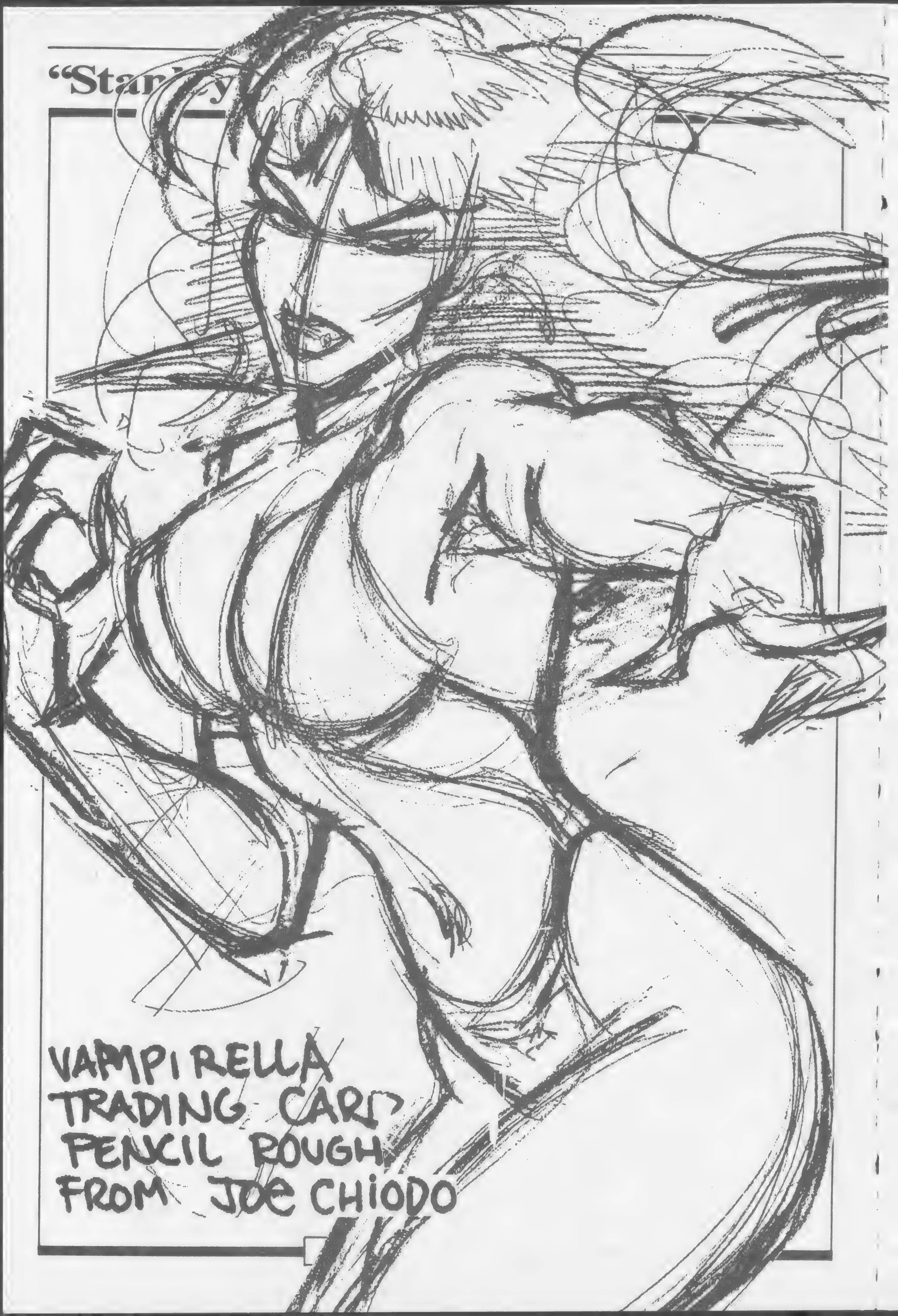
RICHARD HOWELL

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Richard Howell
Born: Nov. 16
Towns Lived In: Saugus, Danvers, Cambridge (all Mass.), Edgewater, Leonia (both NJ)
Influences: Jack Kirby, Milton Caniff, Leonard Starr, Dan Curtis, Patrick Mulcahey, Jerome & Bridget Dobson, Archie Goodwin, Mike Sekowsky, Nick Cardy, Glynis Oliver, Tom Orzechowski
Last Movie Seen: ED WOOD
Last Book Read: THE DEVIL'S HORSEMEN. It's about the Mongol invasion of Europe.
Weaknesses: Horror movies, soap operas, sentimental country or show music
Family: Two cats, Barnabas and Willie, named after the vampire from DARK SHADOWS and his idiot manservant.
For Fun I: do more work.

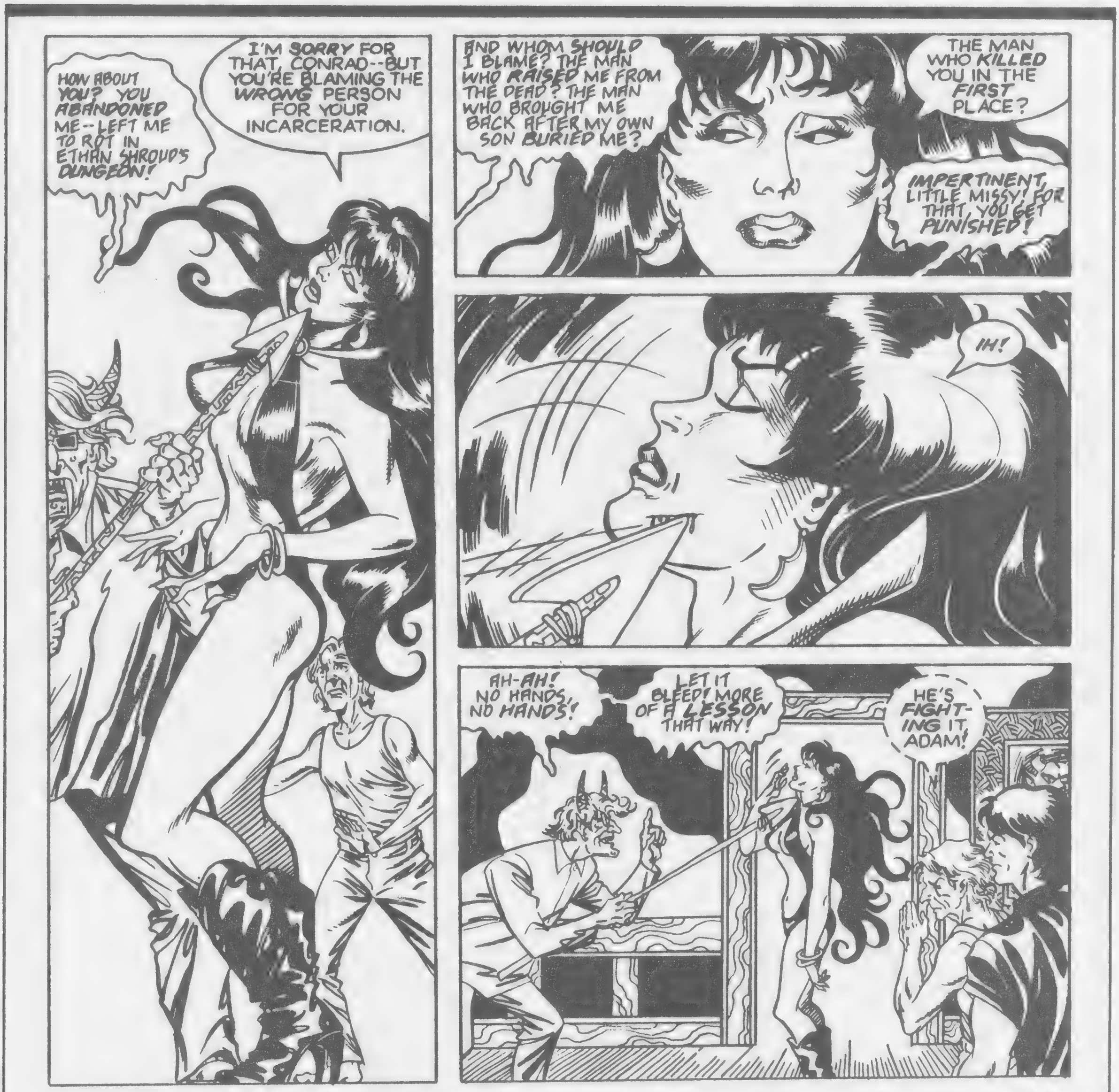

ELVIRA
11 12 1 2
10

Elvira®, Mistress of the Dark TM & © 1995 Queen "B" Productions. Vampirella ® & ©1995 Harris Publications. Deadbeats & Soulsearchers TM & ©1995 Claypool Comics, Boffin Books, To Be Continued, Inc. & Richard Howell.



VAMPIRELLA
TRADING CARD
PENCIL ROUGH
FROM JOE CHIODO

direction to take the Warren assets.”


HOW ABOUT YOU? YOU ABANDONED ME--LEFT ME TO ROT IN ETHAN SHROUD'S DUNGEON!
I'M SORRY FOR THAT, CONRAD--BUT YOU'RE BLAMING THE WRONG PERSON FOR YOUR INCARCERATION.
AND WHOM SHOULD I BLAME? THE MAN WHO RAISED ME FROM THE DEAD? THE MAN WHO BROUGHT ME BACK AFTER MY OWN SON BURIED ME?
THE MAN WHO KILLED YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE?
IMPERTINENT, LITTLE MISSY! FOR THAT, YOU GET PUNISHED!
IH!
AH-AH! NO HANDS, NO HANDS!
LET IT BLEED! MORE OF A LESSON THAT WAY!
HE'S FIGHTING IT, ADAM!

Above: VAMPIRELLA as edited by Richard Howell for Harris Publications. Opposite: Exclusive! Joe Chiodo's pencil rough for Topps trading card painting of Vampirella (see McGregor interview for finished card).

DAVID SEIDMAN: *Give us some background on yourself.*

RICHARD HOWELL: Nothing much to tell. I'm originally from New England, I'm a Harvard graduate, and live a quiet life in a quiet town in New Jersey with my two cats.

DAVID: *What work had you been doing in comics before you got involved with Vampirella?*

RICHARD: A little of everything, I'd say. I've been in comics since about 1980, doing just about every job in the business other than operating presses at Sparta. I've drawn HAWKMAN, ALL-STAR SQUADRON and GREEN LANTERN for DC, VISION AND SCARLET WITCH for Marvel, and JONNY QUEST for Comico. I've inked loads of features, and lettered others. I colored books for Dark Horse and Marvel, including a very well-received Masterworks volume of DAREDEVIL. I've also done editing, first on ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED and FANTASY ILLUSTRATED for New Media Publications, then the **Simon** and **Kirby** romance volume REAL LOVE for Eclipse.

DAVID: *Were you a big Vampirella fan?*

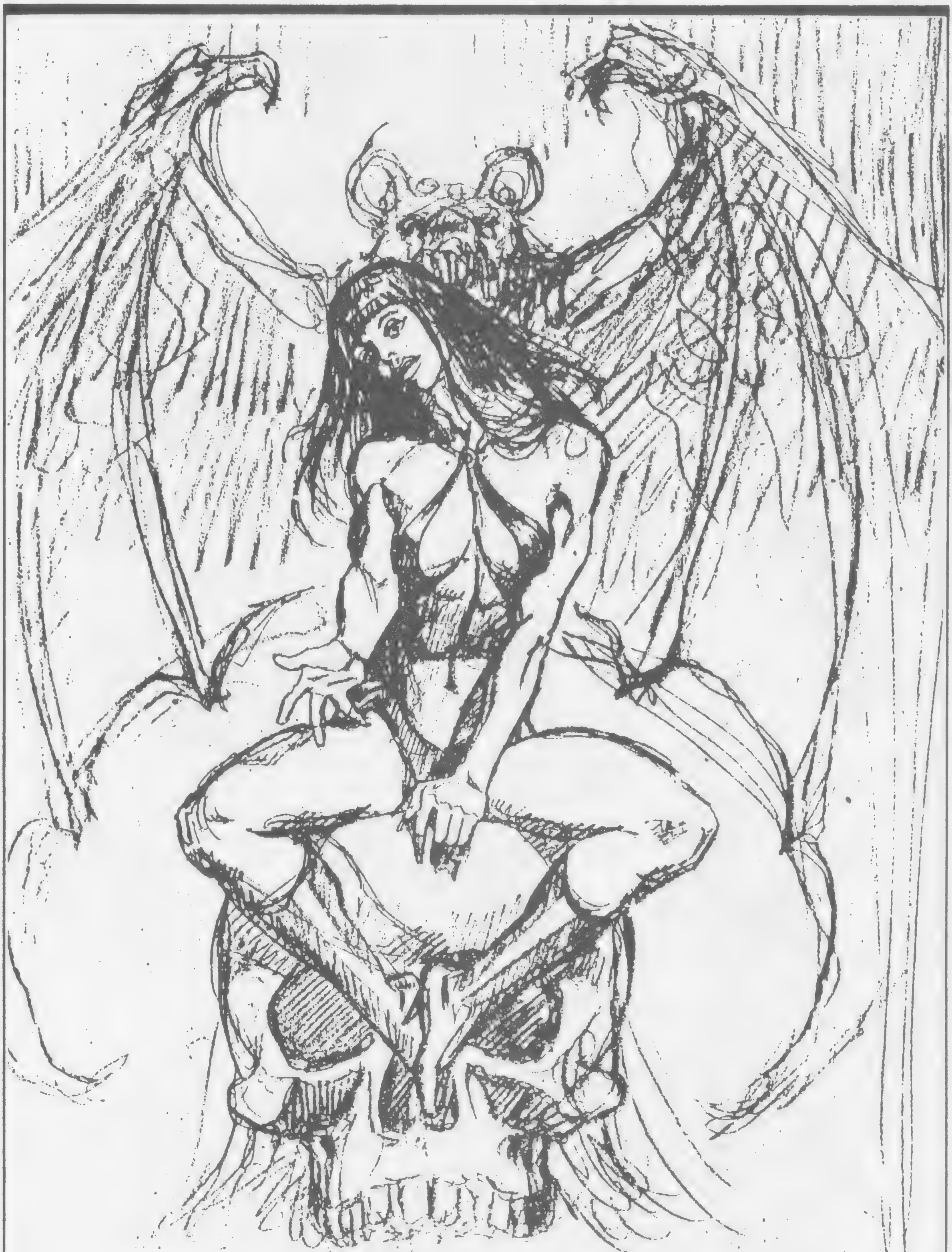
RICHARD: As much as anybody else was, I guess. I was around for the first issue and remember buying it fairly regularly until about #30, and sporadically thereafter.

DAVID: *What did you like about the character?*

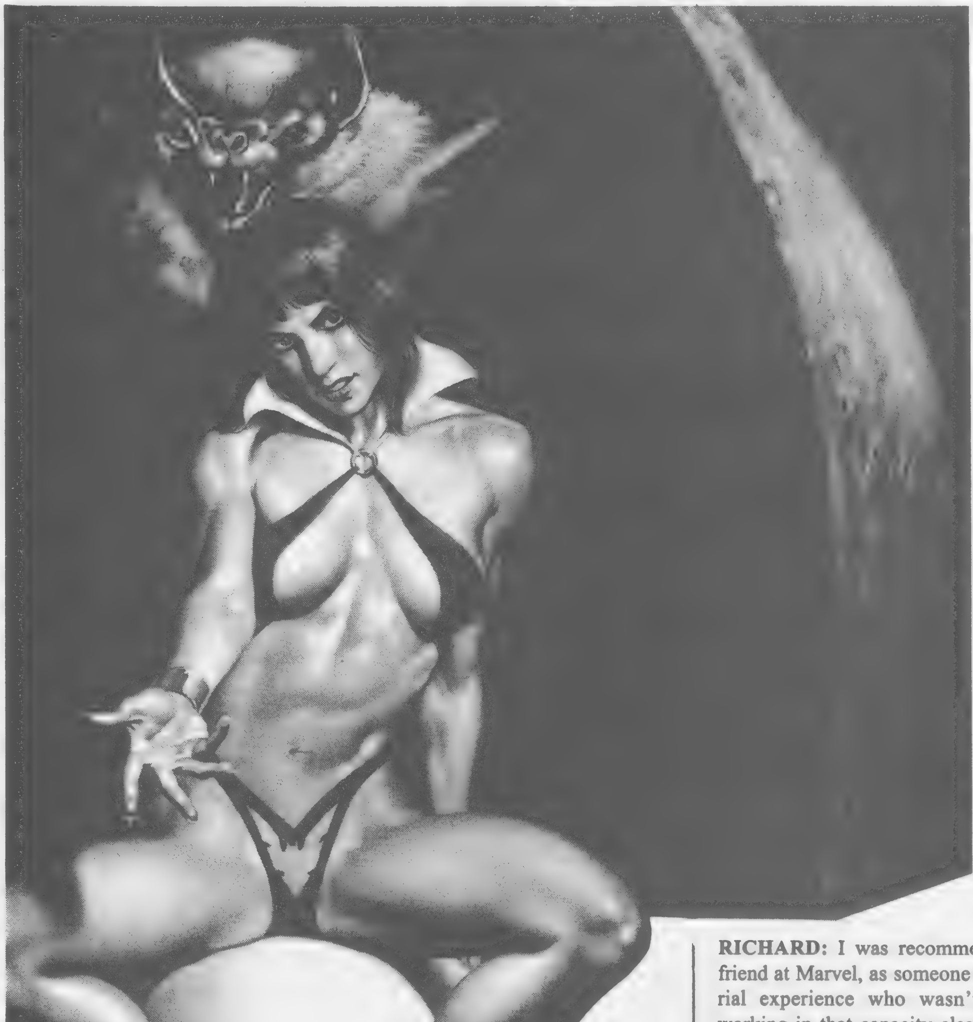
RICHARD: Well, I was a vampire fan anyway, and was just getting to the point of appreciating women, so it seemed like an obvious series for me to like. I was also drawn to the whole concept: A beautiful, sexy woman with a sympathetic, intelligent — crusading, even — personality, yet one whose powers come intertwined with dangerous, predatory impulses. It's a terrific package.

DAVID: *How did you get involved with the Vampirella relaunch?*

“I was a vampire fan anyway, and was just


TO: GARY GERANI
FROM: BORIS

getting to the point of appreciating women."



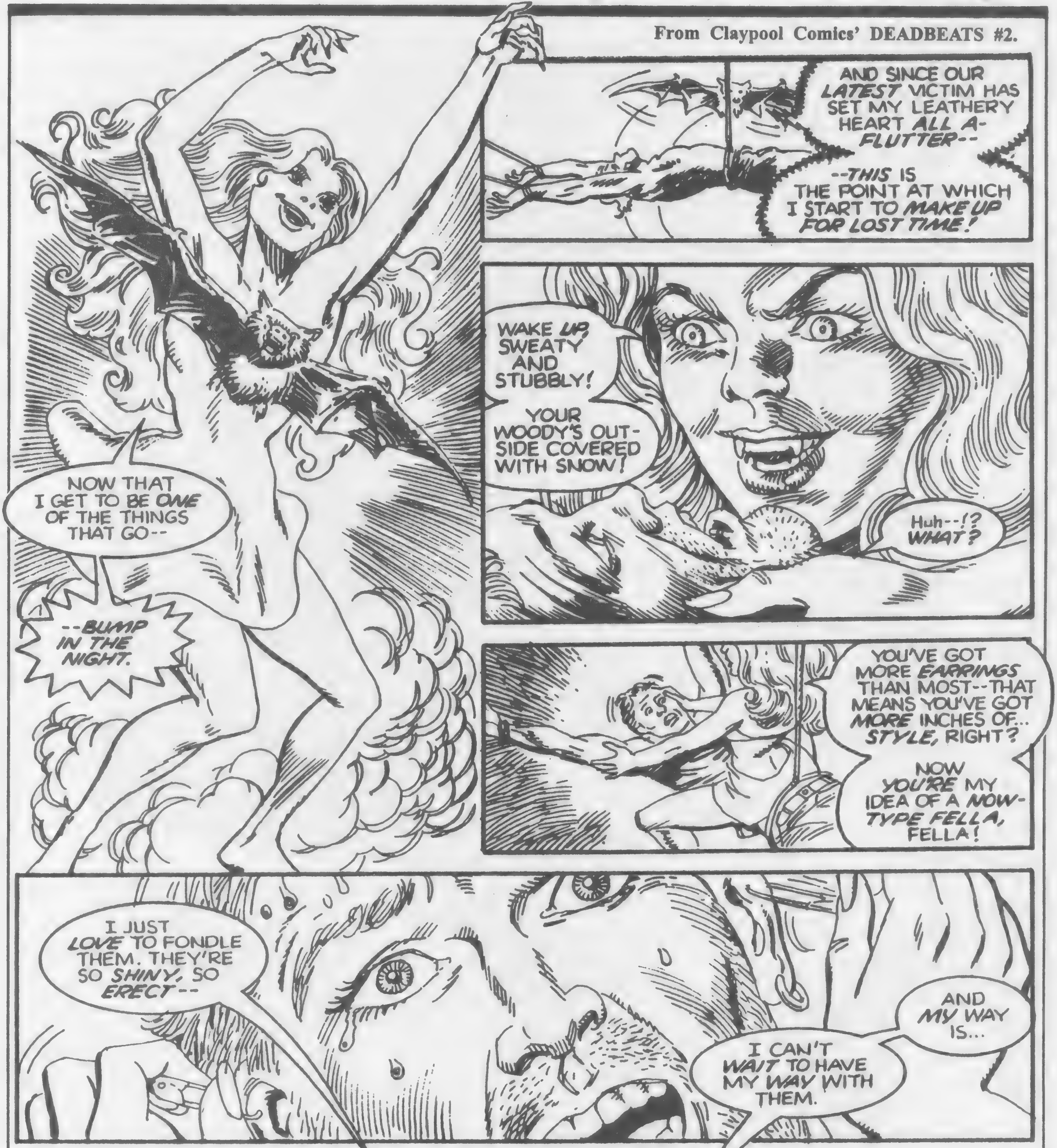
Opposite and above: Another COMICS INTERVIEW exclusive — rough sketch and finished painting by Boris for Topps VAMPIRELLA super premium trading card series.

RICHARD: I was recommended by a friend at Marvel, as someone with editorial experience who wasn't currently working in that capacity elsewhere, and who knew most of the Warren stuff backwards and forwards. **Stanley Harris,** the publisher, was a little unsure of what direction to take the old Warren assets — I'd gathered that my relaunch wasn't the first attempt — so the process involved a lot of "one step forward, two steps back." It took close to a year to find a series direction and format for the new material that we could all live with, so in the meantime, I busied myself by putting together four reprint volumes of classic Warren material: two VAMPIRELLAs, one CREEPY and one EERIE. They printed the first three, and I've heard rumors that the EERIE one has been printed since.

DAVID: *The Vampirella series was published by Harris, distributed by Dark Horse, and edited by you. How did you juggle being part of that triangle?*

RICHARD: Very carefully. At the outset, Stanley wanted all my editorial

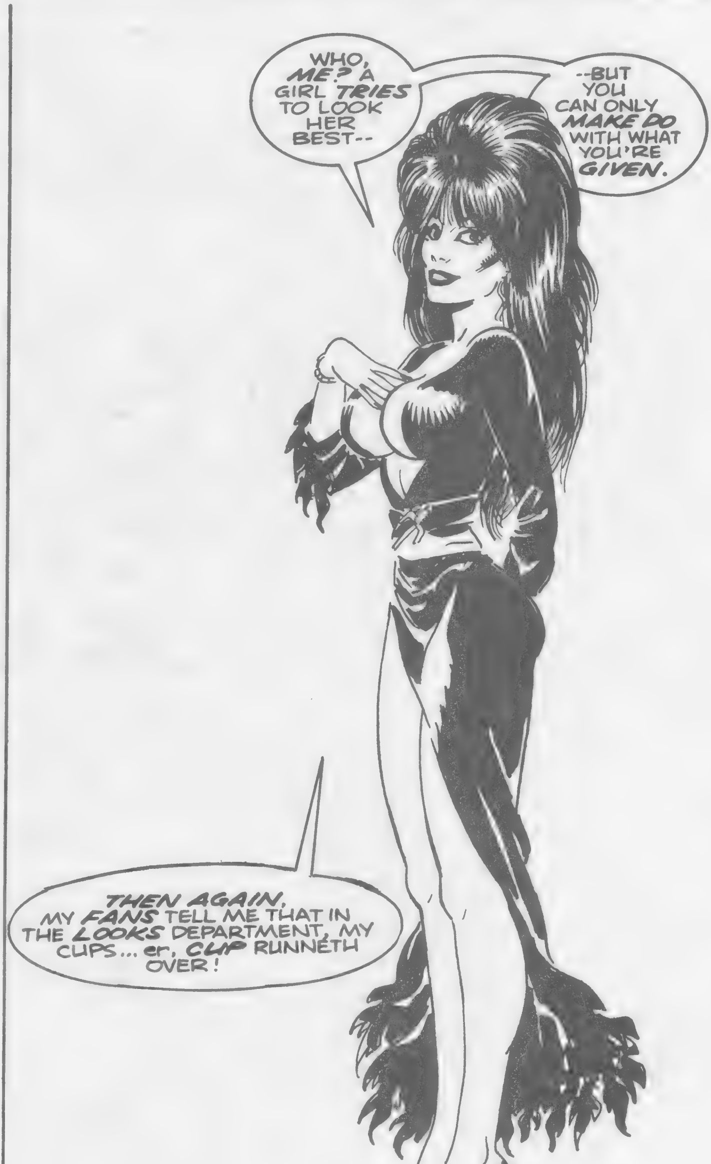
"In DEADBEATS, three vampiresses stalk the night."



From Claypool Comics' DEADBEATS #2.

NOW THAT I GET TO BE *ONE* OF THE THINGS THAT GO--
--*BUMP IN THE NIGHT.*
AND SINCE OUR *LATEST* VICTIM HAS SET MY LEATHERY HEART *ALL A-FLUTTER*--
--*THIS* IS THE POINT AT WHICH I START TO *MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME!*
WAKE *UP,* SWEATY AND STUBBLY!
YOUR WOODY'S OUT-SIDE COVERED WITH SNOW!
Huh--!? *WHAT?*
YOU'VE GOT MORE *EARRINGS* THAN MOST--THAT MEANS YOU'VE GOT *MORE* INCHES OF... *STYLE,* RIGHT?
NOW *YOU'RE* MY IDEA OF A *NOW-TYPE FELLA,* FELLA!
I JUST *LOVE* TO FONDLE THEM. THEY'RE SO *SHINY,* SO *ERECT*--
I CAN'T *WAIT* TO HAVE MY *WAY* WITH THEM.
AND *MY WAY* IS...
HAHAHA HAHAHAHA

Elvira for real: "Shorter, slimmer, less ghoulish."


WHO, ME? A GIRL TRIES TO LOOK HER BEST--
--BUT YOU CAN ONLY MAKE DO WITH WHAT YOU'RE GIVEN.
THEN AGAIN, MY FANS TELL ME THAT IN THE LOOKS DEPARTMENT, MY CUPS... er, CUP RUNNETH OVER!

choices approved by many, many other people, including **Mike Richardson** of Dark Horse, so a lot of the original creative selection process was very indirect and time-consuming, complicated by the fact that I was a freelance packager on these projects, not a staffer, so I worked at home and came into the Harris offices for conferences a couple of times each week. Eventually, either Stanley learned to trust me more, or Mike's time got taken elsewhere, because after that all the decisions were made by the committee of Stanley, **Dennis Page**, art director, **Jesse Reyes**, and me. Later, when **Meloney Crawford Chadwick** came along, she essentially took Stanley's place in meetings and met with him frequently.

DAVID: *How and why did you get separated from Vampirella?*

RICHARD: Well, to some extent that probably depends on whom you ask. I was turning out some terrific comics, but the marketplace wasn't responding at the Image-levels that we all joked about, so I think to some extent my editorial judgment was getting further and further away from the inclinations of Dennis and Meloney. And really, with Meloney there on staff, they had two editors-in-charge for a very small, struggling comics line. I got to be redundant really fast. Near the end there, I couldn't assign any covers, any interior art, nor approve any plots. It was hardly an editor's dream job. I resigned shortly after that point.

DAVID: *How did you make the transition from Vampirella to Elvira?*

RICHARD: Easily. **Ed Via** and I had already set up the groundwork for Claypool while I was still at Harris, and we were pursuing a certain licensed property that I'm not supposed to mention. We didn't get it, but Ed still wanted to go ahead with our plans, so I suggested maybe Elvira would be a fine substitute, and Ed agreed enthusiastically.

DAVID: *How did you acquire the Elvira license?*

RICHARD: We took the direct approach. I asked a friend in Hollywood to try and track down Elvira's agent, and he did it easily. I had a few very encouraging conversations with **Mark Pierson,** Elvira's personal manager, about the tone we would like to see in an Elvira comics series, and he got enthusiastic, too. Then we set the lawyers up with each others phone numbers, and it all went on from there.

DAVID: *Elvira had been tried in comics before, with limited success. How did you plan to make the character successful this time around?*

RICHARD: Well, what I told **Mark Pierson** was that we had a sure-fire way to avoid the pitfalls of the previous series: It would be funny, and Elvira would be in it. I think we've succeeded admirably on both counts, although only the first one is really challengeable.

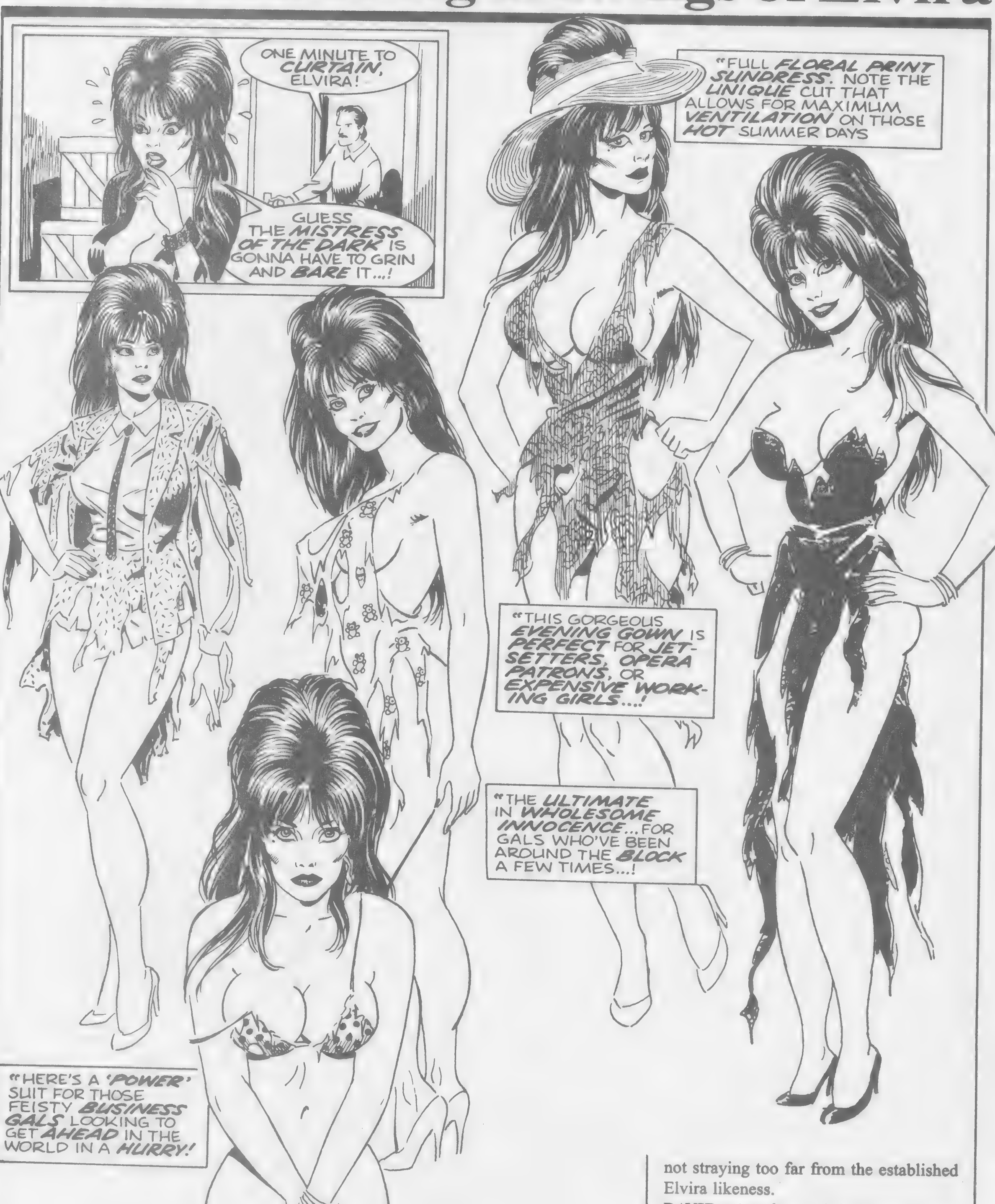
DAVID: *Have you met Elvira? What is she like?*

RICHARD: Shorter, slimmer, less ghoulish. Yes, two years ago I had a lunch meeting with both Mark and Cassandra, Elvira's alter ego, in Los Angeles. I found them both to be very grounded, very nice people. Cassandra even told a few stories of some of Elvira's personal public appearances at which things went terribly wrong. I used some of them as a basis for the lead story in ELVIRA #4.

DAVID: *How involved is she in the creation of the stories and the art?*

RICHARD: As much or as little as she wants to be. She and Mark read and approve every plot before we even work them to script form, and they each read every story in finished art form. They're really mostly concerned with matters of taste in the stories — and, of course, our

“I want lots of big drawings of Elvira


ONE MINUTE TO CURTAIN, ELVIRA!
GUESS THE MISTRESS OF THE DARK IS GONNA HAVE TO GRIN AND BARE IT...!
"FULL FLORAL PRINT SUNDRESS. NOTE THE UNIQUE CUT THAT ALLOWS FOR MAXIMUM VENTILATION ON THOSE HOT SUMMER DAYS
"THIS GORGEOUS EVENING GOWN IS PERFECT FOR JET-SETTERS, OPERA PATRONS, OR EXPENSIVE WORKING GIRLS...!
"THE ULTIMATE IN WHOLESOME INNOCENCE...FOR GALS WHO'VE BEEN AROUND THE BLOCK A FEW TIMES...!
"HERE'S A 'POWER' SUIT FOR THOSE FEISTY BUSINESS GALS LOOKING TO GET AHEAD IN THE WORLD IN A HURRY!
"SUN-WORSHIPPERS-- REJOICE! NOW YOU CAN GET THAT FULL-BODIED TAN YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED! JUST KEEP AN EYE PEELED FOR THE COPS."

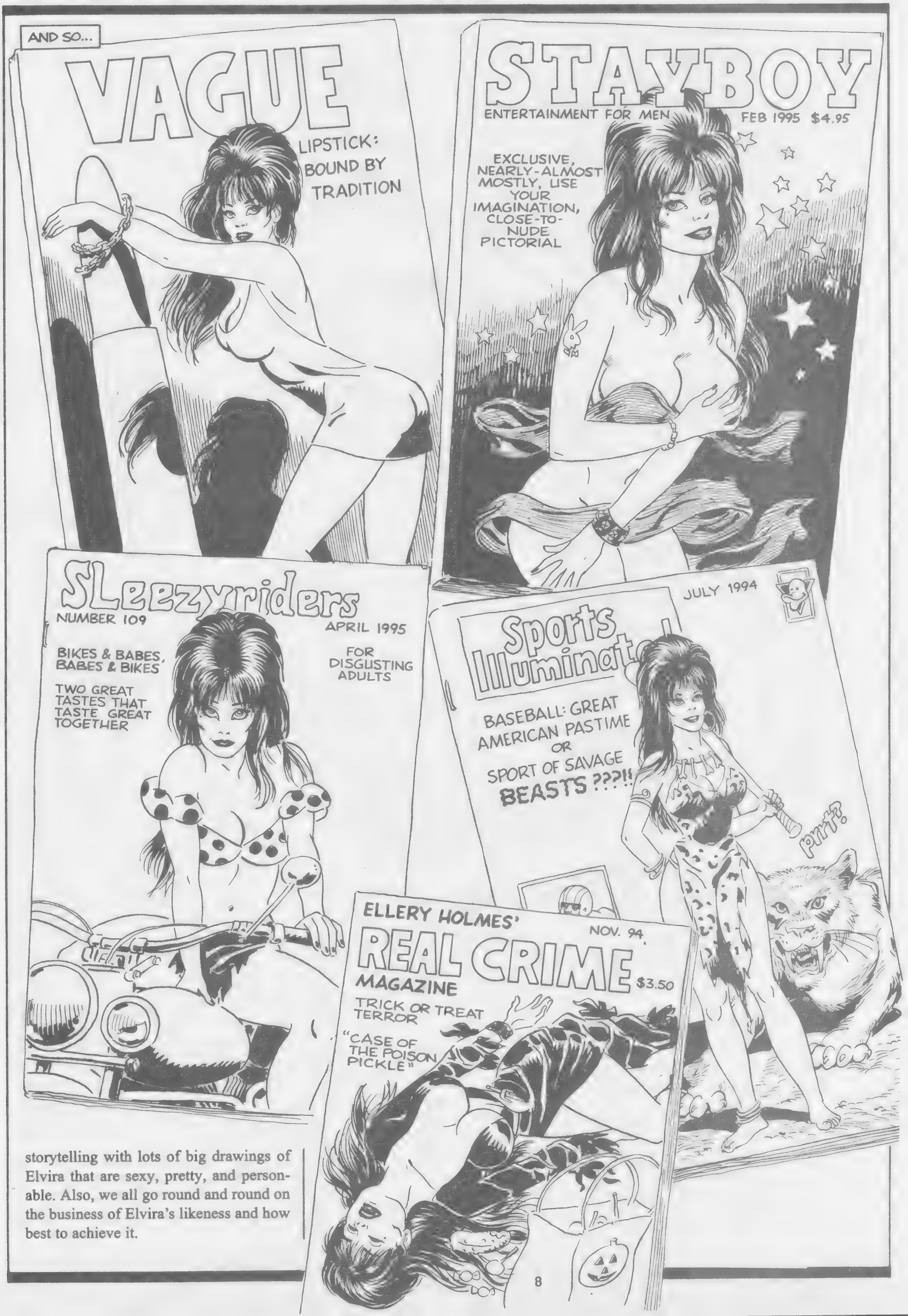
This spread: Elvira gets the fashion treatment, art by Tom Simonton & Louis LaChance, from ELVIRA #22, published by Claypool Comics.

not straying too far from the established Elvira likeness.

DAVID: *As editor of the Elvira book, what guidance do you give the writers and artists?*

RICHARD: It depends a lot on which creators we're talking about. I work closely with **Kurt Busiek** on concepts and individual jokes, and with **Frank Strom** on story concepts and details. As far as the art goes, I want clear

that are sexy, pretty, and personable.”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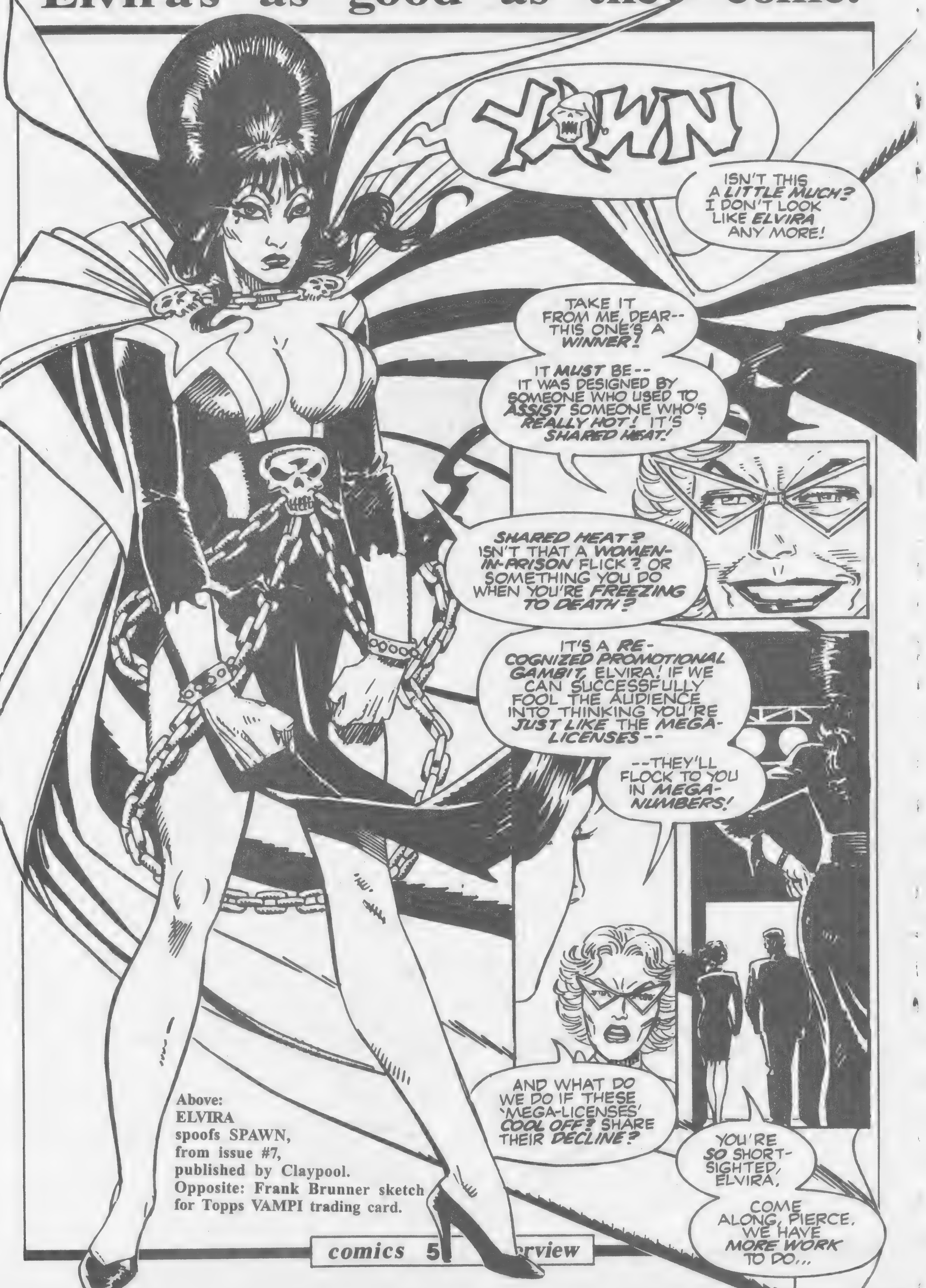
storytelling with lots of big drawings of Elvira that are sexy, pretty, and personable. Also, we all go round and round on the business of Elvira’s likeness and how best to achieve it.

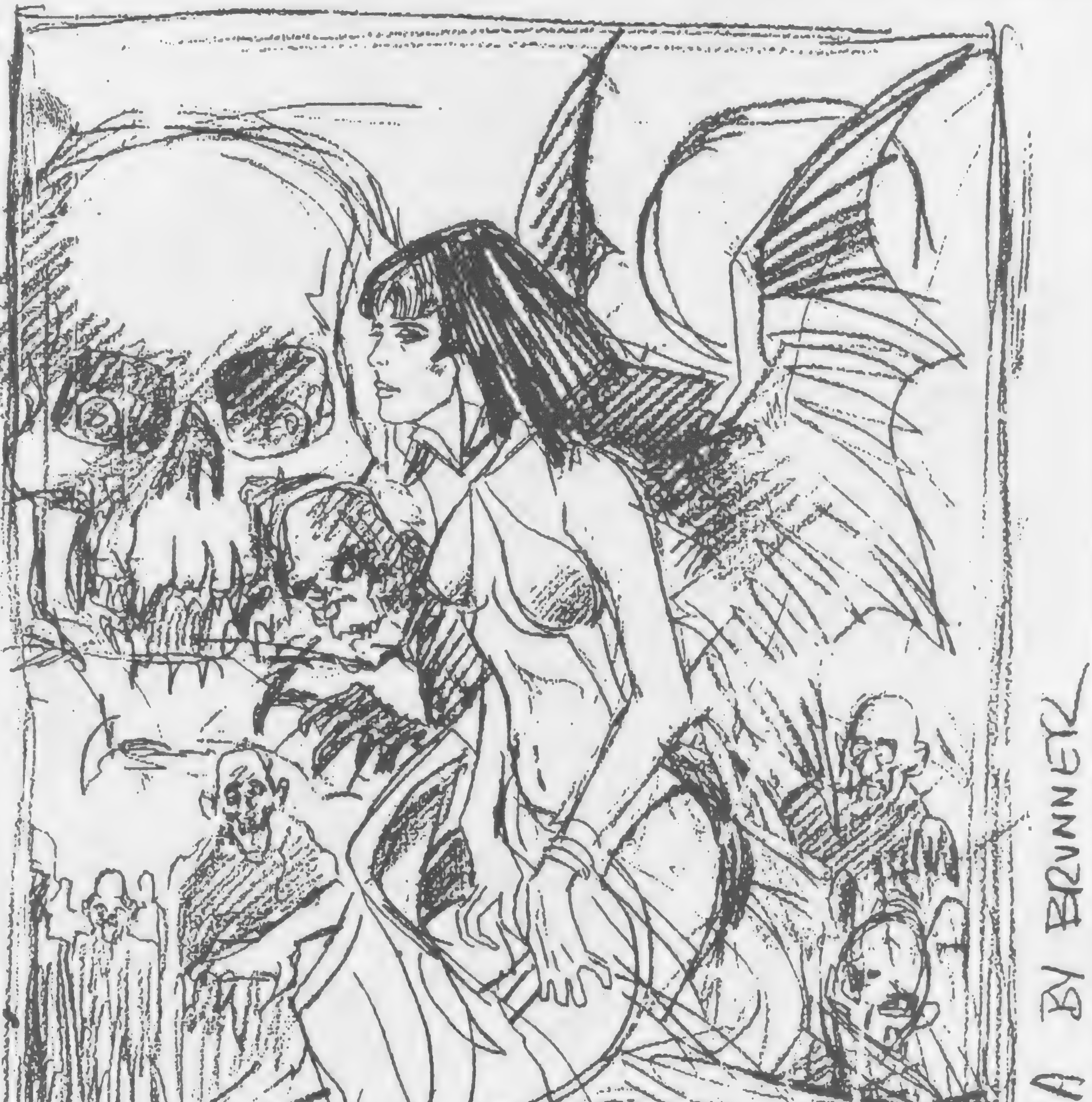
“Elvira’s as good as they come.”


YAWN
ISN'T THIS A *LITTLE MUCH?* I DON'T LOOK LIKE *ELVIRA* ANY MORE!
TAKE IT FROM ME, DEAR-- THIS ONE'S A *WINNER!*
IT *MUST* BE-- IT WAS DESIGNED BY SOMEONE WHO USED TO *ASSIST* SOMEONE WHO'S *REALLY HOT!* IT'S *SHARED HEAT!*
SHARED HEAT? ISN'T THAT A *WOMEN-IN-PRISON* FLICK? OR SOMETHING YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE *FREEZING TO DEATH?*
IT'S A *RECOGNIZED PROMOTIONAL GAMBIT*, ELVIRA! IF WE CAN SUCCESSFULLY FOOL THE AUDIENCE INTO THINKING YOU'RE *JUST LIKE* THE *MEGA-LICENSES*--
--THEY'LL FLOCK TO YOU IN *MEGA-NUMBERS!*
AND WHAT DO WE DO IF THESE 'MEGA-LICENSES' *COOL OFF?* SHARE THEIR *DECLINE?*
YOU'RE *SO* SHORT-SIGHTED, ELVIRA.
COME ALONG, PIERCE. WE HAVE *MORE WORK* TO DO...

Above: ELVIRA spoofs SPAWN, from issue #7, published by Claypool. Opposite: Frank Brunner sketch for Topps VAMPI trading card.

"I don't see Vampirella having any sense of humor."

DAVID: *How do you compare the personality of Elvira to that of Vampirella?*
RICHARD: The way I see them, they're really not that dissimilar, although the worlds in which they each live are markedly different. They're each intelligent, sensitive, sexy women with a free sense of right and wrong and a commitment to help the nice guy win whenever possible. I'm referring to the Vampirella I edited, that is, based on the **Archie Goodwin** model. Oh, and the main difference between the



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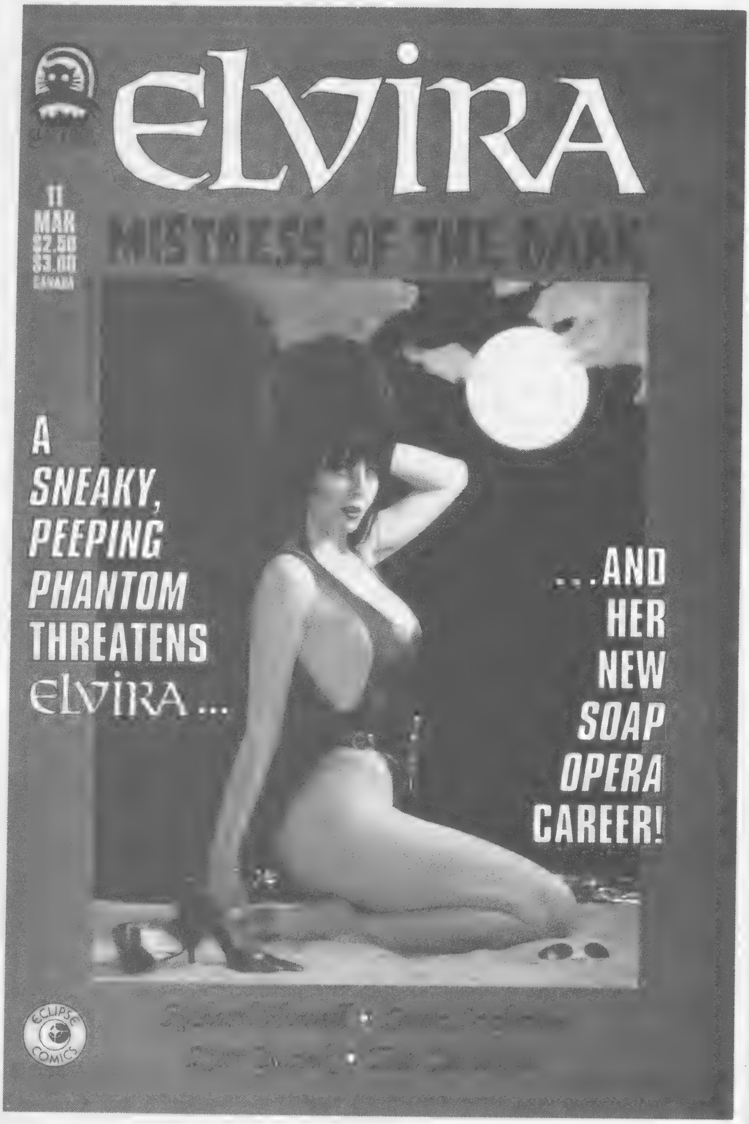
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characters is that I don't see Vampirella as having any sense of humor at all.

DAVID: *Is Elvira really a "bad girl," or is she just drawn that way?*

RICHARD: I think Elvira's as good as they come, and that's definitely the vision that the Elvira people have, too. One of our original concept drawings had Elvira with an evil grin on her face, and they told me quite specifically that she's not evil, nasty, or even mildly unkind. She thinks of herself as a great person, and she shouldn't be judged by the morbidity of her choice of attire. Her look is quite normal for her.

DAVID: *How did you make the transition from publishing only Elvira to publishing the entire Claypool line?*

RICHARD: Well, it didn't make loads of sense to set up a new publishing company, even one with Claypool's low overhead, for just one series. Ed wanted more books, and I obliged, by bringing the Fear City concept to him.

DAVID: *Describe the other books in the line.*

RICHARD: There's PHANTOM OF FEAR CITY, by **Steve Englehart** and a number of artists (currently **John Heebink** and **Frank Springer**), SOULSEARCHERS AND COMPANY, by **Peter David, Amanda Conner, Neil Vokes,** and **Jim Mooney,** and DEADBEATS, by **Ricardo Villagran** and me. They all take place in a small fictional New England town, Mystic Grove, Connecticut, and intersect in surprising ways. The crossovers are always interesting to see, since the books each have very different tones: PoFC is our grand opera, with mythic struggles and big emotional crescendos in a ghost's search for redemption through true love; SOULSEARCHERS is our group of wacky ghostbusters, each with specialized abilities — it's as close as we get to a superhero title — but it's full of snide insights, satire, and silliness in the very best **Peter David** tradition; DEADBEATS is our brooding horror melodrama, with sweeps into shocking violence and tragedy.

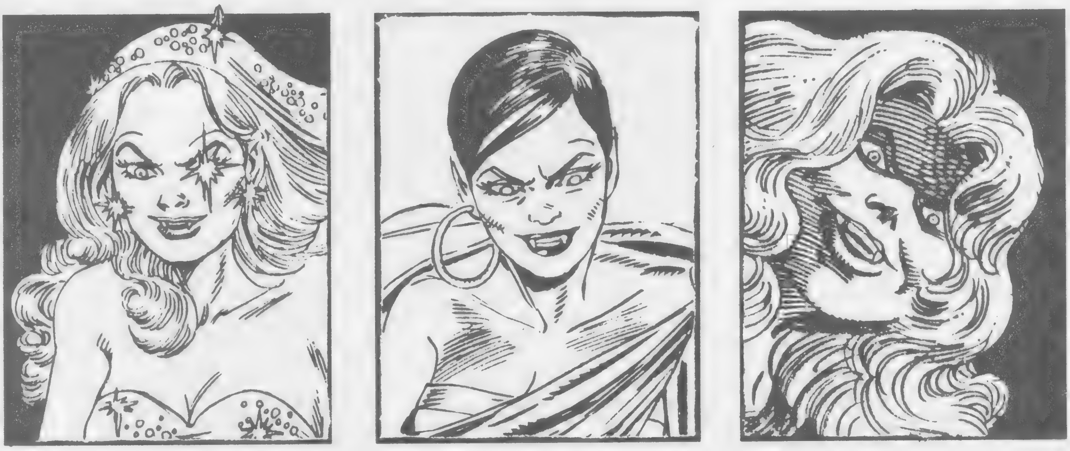
DAVID: *Are there "bad girls" in the other books?*

RICHARD: Certainly. The main villainess of PoFC is probably as nasty a piece of work as you're likely to see anywhere. She's arranged for Sandy's — our heroine's — mother to be killed, ruined Sandy's father's financial empire, then lured Dad into marrying her. Over in DEADBEATS, there are three vampiresses stalking the night, and none of them will ever be mistaken for a crusader like Vampirella. Colleen's undoubtedly the worst, most sadistic character I've ever had the honor of drawing. That stunt she pulled with Kory Tenhook's ear adornments in #2 was about as graphically violent a scene as I've ever done. Martine isn't as gleeful as Colleen, but she enjoys evoking terror in her victims more than actually killing them. Brittany is still more victim than killer, and her particular fate is dictated by that.

DAVID: *What's in the future for each of the books?*

RICHARD: In each case, more of the same. PoFC comes to its explosive conclusion in issue #12, but we're in discussion with Steve for another project, perhaps featuring some of the same characters from that series. I've been a big fan of Steve's for years, and I'd like to try and retain him in our little family here. I think that PHANTOM OF FEAR CITY #1-#12 may well be the finest sustained piece of writing he's done to date. Soulsearchers will continue to encounter bizarre situations and combat them with their unique combination of powers and potshots. Upcoming is: the unleashing of a league of monster characters from cheap horror

BAD



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films; a gargoyle who won't stop haunting a castle; the group being called in to save "Star Convoy: Venturer;" an attack by crazed killer dairy products; and squaring off against the Scream Queens. It should be a crazy, fun ride. Over in DEADBEATS, the conclusion (in #12) of the three-way war between the 'beats, the vampire king, and the humans has forced the plot onto a new level. Southie's off on his own adventure, Mason's condition has to be addressed, and the surviving vampires are more out of control than ever. It's going to be really, really wild stuff.

DAVID: *Are you planning to change or expand the Claypool line?*

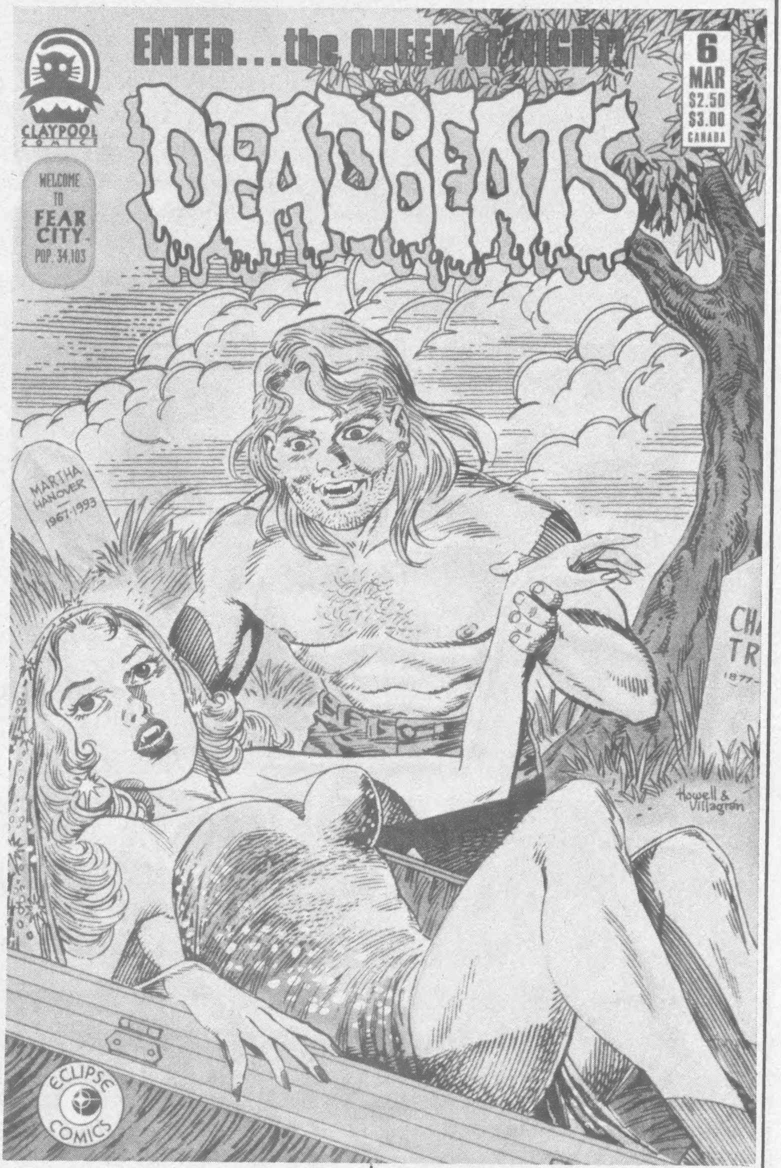
RICHARD: Other than replacing one **Englehart** series with another, I don't foresee any changes — and I think an expansion would kill me.

DAVID: *How do you handle the multiple chores of writer, editor, penciller, and Claypool executive?*

RICHARD: Mostly by never going anywhere or doing anything except work. Most days are ten to sixteen hours of Claypool-related work. Fortunately, I have the time and the disposition for it, but it is an immense load. Yesterday, for instance, I got up early and scripted the two DEADBEATS pages I drew the previous day, then drew two more by the end of the afternoon, fielding any business-related phone calls in between. At four, I left to make xeroxes, and upon my return had three different business-crisis phone messages waiting. I edited an Elvira story, ballooned another one, and prepared all the Fed Ex packages for the day. Then about two more hours of outgoing editorial check-in calls, a quick dinner, then I drew two upcoming DEADBEATS covers, designed my next two DEADBEATS pages (for today), then I finally got to bed around two o'clock. Duties change from day to day, but that's just about what's normal here.

DAVID: *What do you think about the current "bad girls" trend? Will it pass, or is it here to stay?*

RICHARD: Oh, I think it's always been around, back to Lilith and up through Salome, Lady Macbeth, Becky Sharp, Fleur Forsyte, **Theda Bara, Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich** to some extent, specifically in THE BLUE ANGEL, the bad Bond girls, Angelique from DARK SHADOWS, the various soap-opera vixens, the B-movie monster-women like Nightmare Sisters and the Queen of Evil. The character concept of a dangerous, powerful woman has always been attractive, both for women and men. It combines the fantasy of the character who's determined enough to go after whatever she wants, and strong enough to get it. It also ladles generous dollops of sex into the package and that's an irresistible combination.



DAVID: *Is that the way Claypool handles it?*

RICHARD: Well, our books — even the humor ones — are written at a very mature level and we're not afraid to touch on those types of themes. Sex and power are universal drives, and very powerful ones, that we feel the need to address — without being absurdly exploitative, of course. One critic called the Claypool line "the most genuinely erotic comics around" (and he was reviewing DEADBEATS at the time). DEADBEATS has also been called the most violent series around, and the most moral comic book published today — these are the opinions of different people, of course, and I thought that the scope of those opinions paid us a nice compliment.

DAVID: *Anything else you'd like to add?*

RICHARD: Just the usual, that Claypool Comics feature great work by top talent, and that they're great comics, specifically for those of us who love the medium and love to read comics. I think most readers who're looking for comics with intelligence, taste, passion, and fun would be well rewarded by trying out our books — and if we could solve our distribution dead-ends, I think we'd be the next sensation.

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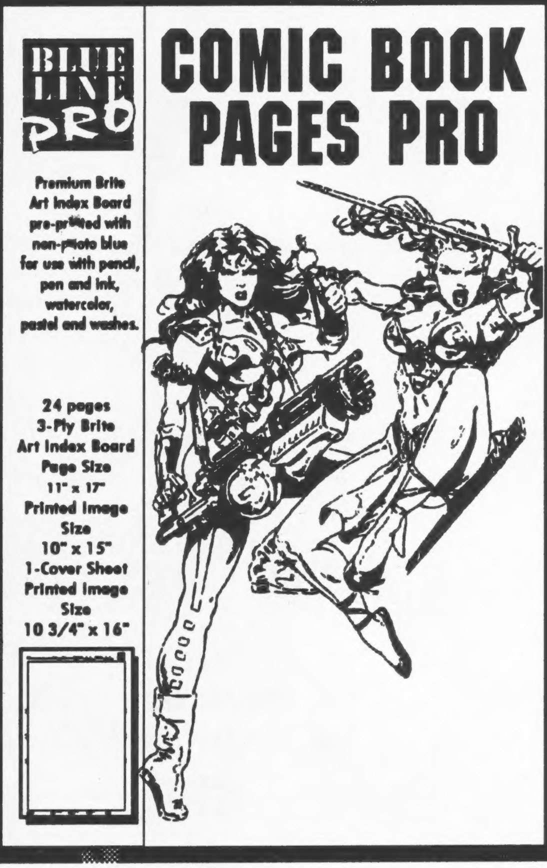

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